

PEOPLE, PLACES, AND VIOLENCE: A STUDY OF THE  
OLD FRENCH *CHANSON D'ANTIOCHE*

by

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*“Sirs, gather round and stop chattering; if you want to hear the glorious song that I shall sing. Come closer to hear about Jerusalem, for nowhere else will you hear such a thing. Let us begin with the Holy City, where Christ’s body was elevated on a cross. Those before me may have forgotten this story, but it has not been lost... And so, let us begin a story from our past.”*

*La Chanson d’Antioche*

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## ABSTRACT

The *Chanson d'Antioche* is a twelfth-century, Old French epic poem which, together with two other works, the *Chanson des Chétifs* and *Chanson de Jérusalem*, forms a trilogy of *chansons de geste* referred to as the central, or “historical”, crusade cycle. The *Chanson d'Antioche*, which is the earliest, longest, and most detailed of the three works, provides a quasi-historical account of the First Crusade up until the siege and capture of Antioch. The first half of the poem describes the events which bring the crusaders to Antioch, while the second half focuses on the various interactions between Christian and Muslim forces during, and briefly after, the city’s eight-month siege. The poem’s account of these events provides an intimate lens into the *milieu* in which it was performed and highlights contemporary attitudes towards alterity, space, and violence.

## STATEMENT

I have not followed a consistent rule when transliterating from Old French to English as it seemed counterproductive to not use established English forms for well-known places and names. As such, western names are given their modern forms, hence Stephen is used instead of *Estiennes* and Bohemond is used rather than *Buiemons*, but less common names like *Corbaran* and *Datiens* have retained their ancient forms. Likewise, I follow this convention with cities, thus I have used Edessa, Nicaea, and Antioch instead of *Rohais*, *Nike*, and *Andioce*. With respect to Turkish and Arab names, I have followed the *Encyclopedia of Islam* when discussing historical narratives; however, when referencing the *Chanson d'Antioche*, I follow the spelling of names used in the text itself. For the Old French version of the *Chanson d'Antioche*, Jan Nelson's transcription of Manuscript B<sup>1</sup> is used, and for the English version Susan Edgington and Carol Sweetenham's translation of manuscript A<sup>2</sup> is used. I use the annotation (A[*Antioche*], v[verse]. Line-Line) when referencing the text to direct the reader to a specific poetic line in Nelson's work. Generally, I follow Sweetenham and Edgington's translation of the Old French into English, however, in some cases (when a more specific interpretation is needed) I have personally translated passages. These instances are mentioned in the footnotes together with the corresponding page number for Sweetenham and Edgington's translation.

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<sup>1</sup> *La Chanson d'Antioche*, ed. Jan A. Nelson, The Old French Crusade Cycle, 4 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2003). Nelson's edition is used because it translates from the most complete manuscript (B.N. fr. 786) which includes every possible detail and episode from the poem.

<sup>2</sup> *The Chanson d'Antioche: An Old French Account of the First Crusade*, eds. Susan Edgington and Carol Sweetenham (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011). Edgington and Sweetenham's edition is used because it is the only complete translation of the poem in English. It follows the same tradition as Suzanne Duparc-Quioc in using the most ancient manuscript (B.N. fr. 12558).

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

In July 1099, four years after Pope Urban II's famous speech at Clermont, the armies of the First Crusade arrived outside Jerusalem's walls and seized the holiest location in all of Christendom from its Muslim occupants. This victory, however, had not come easily. The crusaders' conquest of the "Holy City" had required a treacherous journey across thousands of miles, a number of pitched battles (Civetot, Dorylaeum), and several protracted sieges (Nicaea, Antioch), all of which claimed the lives of thousands *enroute* to their final destination. Of the 70,000 to 80,000 soldiers who set out from Europe, no more than 25,000 survived.<sup>3</sup> Yet, despite the hardships endured by those who participated in the First Crusade, the successful conquest of Christianity's terrestrial and spiritual centre marked this movement as one worthy of political, religious, and artistic commentary.<sup>4</sup> As a result, tales of individual heroism, clashes with the "pagan" Turks, and suffering in the name of Christ were endlessly reproduced in works seeking to memorialize the crusaders' accomplishments and the righteousness of their cause. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the period's newest form of literary production: the *chansons de geste* (songs of deeds).

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Frankopan, *The First Crusade: The Call from the East* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2012), 3.

<sup>4</sup> As the city where Jesus lived most of his adult life, Jerusalem occupied an important place in medieval cosmologies as the birthplace of Christianity. Jerusalem was also believed to be the physical center of the world, as represented by medieval O-T maps (*Orbis Terrarium*) which placed the Orient at the top and centered on the Holy City. Frankopan, *The First Crusade*, 5.

The *Chanson d'Antioche* is a twelfth-century, Old French epic poem that provides a quasi-historical account of the First Crusade up until the siege and capture of Antioch.<sup>5</sup> The first half of the poem describes the events which bring the crusaders to Antioch, while the second half focuses on the various interactions between Christian and Muslim forces during, and briefly after, the city's eight-month siege. Previously considered the putative account of an eyewitness named Richard le Pèlerin, it is now generally acknowledged that the *Chanson d'Antioche* was heavily edited by a later *remanieur* named Grandior de Douai between 1190 and 1212.<sup>6</sup> Grandior's contributions include the expansion and reworking of an original, now lost,<sup>7</sup> version of the poem into its current form, together with the addition of two new *chansons* to this initial work. These additions, the *Chanson des Chétifs* and *Chanson de Jérusalem*, resume the *Chanson d'Antioche's* narrative and follow the remainder of the First Crusade to the capture and sack of Jerusalem in 1099. Together, they form a trilogy of *chansons* referred to as the "historical", or central, crusade cycle.<sup>8</sup> Later, sometime in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, several other works were developed around this nucleus and came to form the Old French Crusade Cycle (OFCC), a collection of interconnected poems that provide a prehistory to the events of 1096, follow the major events of the First Crusade, and describe the period after Jerusalem's capture in 1099.

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<sup>5</sup> The term "quasi-historical" is used to highlight the fact that the *Chanson d'Antioche*, despite its historical framework, clearly includes fantastical elements in its contents and descriptions. Set in real historical spaces (e.g., Rome, Jerusalem) and following historical characters (e.g., Godfrey, Tancred), the text often defies historicity with its emphasis on miraculous individual heroism, divine intervention, and the marvelous. The result is a lively historical narrative filled with drama, violence, and humour that was designed to entertain, influence, and inspire its audience.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed discussion on the dating of the earliest manuscript and the likelihood of a late 12<sup>th</sup> or early 13<sup>th</sup>-century date of composition see: *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Duparc-quioc and Sweetenham both argue for the existence of an original *ur-Antioche* which provided the basis for Grandior's reworked version.

<sup>8</sup> The term "historical" is used to differentiate this trilogy from the wider body of *chansons* that make up the entirety of the Old French Crusade Cycle.

Not only was the historical crusade cycle extensive, but it was also quite popular – fifteen different branches of the cycle survive today in a total of sixteen known manuscripts.<sup>9</sup> This wealth of documentation suggests that there was considerable interest in these poems across a number of centuries, including years long after the actual crusading period. However, despite the cycle’s apparent popularity and influence, the *Chanson d’Antioche*, which is the earliest, longest, and most detailed of the three works, remains relatively understudied, often neglected in favour of more well-known literary productions like the *Chanson de Roland*, *La Prise d’Orange* and the *Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*.<sup>10</sup>

In an effort to address this imbalance and provide some new interpretations, this thesis seeks to understand the performance and reception of the *Chanson d’Antioche* through three thematic lenses: 1) the depiction of non-European peoples and culture; 2) the imagined portrait of Antioch and the Near-East; and 3) the description and imagery of spectacular violence. The analysis of these themes – alterity, space, violence – is then used to suggest that the *Chanson d’Antioche* must be understood as a work that provides valuable insights into contemporary mentalities and attitudes. What follows is an introduction to the poem’s narrative background

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<sup>9</sup> In total there are thirteen separate works in the *cycle*, with the *Antioche*, *Chétifs*, and *Jérusalem* forming the basis for the addition of later works. The “historical” crusade cycle is held in nine manuscripts, six in Paris (BNF [Bibliothèque nationale de la France], fr., 12558, 795, 1621, 786, 12569 and Arsenal 3139); one in Berne (Bürgerbibliothek, 320); one in London (British Library, Add. 36615); and one in Turin (Bibl. Nazionale Universitaria, LIII-25.) Each of these manuscripts contains the three *chansons*, accompanied by a number of other branches and stories. A few other manuscripts have fragments of the three texts: for *Antioche*, the fragment of Laon (Bibl. mun. ms. 398); for *Les Chétifs*, the Oxford fragment (Bodleian Library, Hatton 77); and for *Jérusalem*, a number of fragments have survived at London (British Library, MS Royal 15 E VI), Oxford (Bodleian Library, MS Douce 381) and Stafford (Staffordshire Record Office, D. 641/2/84). The first manuscript (BNF 12558) is generally considered to be the most ancient manuscript of the cycle. For a description and classification of the manuscripts see; Suzanne Duparc-Quioc, *Le Cycle de la Croisade* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne, 1955), 9-17; and Jan A. Nelson, Emanuel J. Mickel, and Geoffrey M. Myers, *The Old French Crusade Cycle* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1977), xiii.

<sup>10</sup> *The Song of Roland*, ed. and trans. Jessie Crosland (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1967); *La Prise d’Orange: Chanson de geste de la fin du XIIe siècle*, ed. Claude Régner (Paris: Klincksieck, 1967); *La Chanson du Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*, ed. Gaston Paris (France: Didot, 1877).



(the First Crusade), an examination of the *chanson de geste* genre, and a historiographical review. The first chapter then looks at how the *Chanson d'Antioche* interacts with alterity through an analysis of the so-called “pagan” Saracen and his Christian counterpart. The second chapter examines representations of space in the description of travel, Antioch, and Jerusalem. And finally, the third chapter delves into the use of spectacular violence to drive and develop narrative plotlines.

### **The First Crusade**

The European Middle Ages have been notoriously represented as a period of decay and stagnation when, in fact, this was a time during which societies experienced fundamental change and development. More specifically, the period from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century saw significant increases in Europe’s population and the growth of urban centers; the popularization of vernacular languages and literary standardization; the proliferation of Christianity and a heightened sense of spirituality; increased papal authority and eschatological fervor; and the burgeoning of economies and international markets. These changes came to influence medieval societies in several ways and have been analyzed by historians such as Malcolm Barber,<sup>11</sup> Thomas Asbridge,<sup>12</sup> Zoé Oldenbourg,<sup>13</sup> Marcus Bull,<sup>14</sup> and Jonathan Riley-Smith<sup>15</sup> as driving factors in the development of the period’s preeminent movement: the crusades.

Christian victory at the battle of Ascalon over the Fatimid Egyptians on August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1099, was the final military action in what has been retrospectively labelled the “First Crusade.”

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<sup>11</sup> Malcolm Barber, *The Crusader States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Zoé Oldenbourg, *The Crusades* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966).

<sup>14</sup> Marcus Bull, “Origins”, in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades*, ed. Jonathan Riley-Smith and Simon Christopher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 14-33.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, “The Crusading Movement and Historians”, in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades*, ed. Jonathan Riley-Smith and Simon Christopher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1-14.

This eventuality was set in motion on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November 1095 when, in a field outside the Frankish city of Clermont, the head of western Christendom, Pope Urban II, delivered one of history's most influential orations.<sup>16</sup> The plethora of contemporary accounts that describe Urban's address, some made by eyewitnesses,<sup>17</sup> make it clear that this speech was not delivered in an attempt to inform those gathered at Clermont of the political situation in the East, nor was it intended to discuss the patriarch's repeated appeals for military aid; rather, it was designed to raise the European nobility's sense of outrage and inspire a war against ethno-religious rivals who "throw down altars, after soiling them with their own filth, circumcise Christians, and pour the resulting blood either on the altars of or into the baptismal vessel."<sup>18</sup>

To motivate participation in his newly-minted crusade, Urban declaimed against the Turk's sacrilegious behaviours, emphasized the plight of eastern Christians, and offered participants a unique spiritual incentive: whomever made the journey, inspired by devotion to Christ rather than worldly desire, would receive remission for their sins, while those who died on campaign would be eternally blessed.<sup>19</sup> As intended, Urban's address inflamed the hearts of Christian Europeans and unleashed a torrent of crusading fervor across the continent. Thousands who heard the call determined to travel East, while several prominent noblemen from all over

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<sup>16</sup> A number of accounts survive that describe Urban's speech at Clermont: Fulcher of Chartres, *The First Crusade: The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and Other Source Materials*, ed. and trans. Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Guibert de Nogent, *The Deeds of God Through the Franks: A Translation of Guibert de Nogent's Gesta Dei per Francos*, ed. and trans. Robert Levine (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1997); Robert the Monk, *Robert the Monk's History of the First Crusade: Historia Iherosolimitana*, ed. and trans. Carol Sweetenham (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005); *Gesta Francorum*, ed. and trans. Rosalinda M. Hill as *The Deeds of the Franks and the Other Pilgrims to Jerusalem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

<sup>17</sup> Fulcher of Chartres, who is known to have been at the council, gives an account of Urban's speech in his *Gesta Francorum Jerusalem Expugnatum* which is considered the most reliable.

<sup>18</sup> Frankopan, *The First Crusade*, 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

Europe, including significant figures such as Raymond of Toulouse and Godfrey of Bouillon, agreed to participate.

In 1096, one year after Urban's address, various armies departed from Europe. First, a popular movement led by Peter the Hermit, often termed the People's Crusade, set out from northern France. These pilgrims travelled by land to Constantinople, infamously persecuting several Jewish communities along the Rhine, and from there crossed into Anatolia where they were annihilated by an army of Seljuk Turks (Civetot). This setback, however, did little to stop the First Crusade's momentum. Later that same year, four official contingents departed from Europe: one from southern France under the leadership of count Raymond of Toulouse; two from northern France under Godfrey of Bouillon and Robert of Flanders; and another from Italy led by the Norman, Bohemond of Taranto.<sup>20</sup> These armies travelled separately to the East and converged on Constantinople between November and April of the following year. Upon their arrival at the Byzantine capital, the leaders of the crusade met with emperor Alexios Komnenos and swore, all except for Raymond, that they would return any captured land to the Byzantine Empire. Following this this exchange of vows, the crusaders were bolstered by a Byzantine force, given supplies, and transported across the Bosphorus strait.<sup>21</sup>

Once in Asia Minor, the crusaders met up with Peter the Hermit and the remnants of the People's Crusade. This combined force then marched to their first major objective, the city of Nicaea.<sup>22</sup> In May 1097, the crusaders arrived outside the walls of Nicaea where they established a siege. This situation lasted for two weeks before Kilij Arslan, the sultan of Rum, returned to his

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Nirmal Dass, *The Deeds of the Franks and Other Jerusalem-Bound Pilgrims: The Earliest Chronicle of the First Crusade* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 35-36.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

capital and attempted to relieve the city. However, Kilij Arslan was defeated in the resulting confrontation and forced to retreat. After the crusaders' victory in battle, the Muslim forces inside Nicaea capitulated and handed over control of the city on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1097.<sup>23</sup>

From Nicaea, the crusaders began their march through Anatolia where they divided themselves into two distinct groups for ease of organization: one army was led by the French and the other by the Normans. These two forces agreed to travel separately to Dorylaeum where they planned to regroup and resupply. However, while travelling towards their destination, the Norman contingent was ambushed by a Seljuk army, once again led by Kilij Arslan. This attack nearly routed the divided Christian forces but was eventually repulsed thanks to the second army's timely arrival. After having defeated the Sultan of Rum for a second time, the crusaders continued to their next objective: the city of Antioch.

In October 1097, after having marched through much of central Anatolia, the crusaders arrived at Antioch. Once there, the armies decided against a direct assault because the city was "fortified with incredible strength and almost impregnable."<sup>24</sup> Instead, they established another siege hoping, as they had at Nicaea, to force the city's capitulation by attrition. However, despite the crusaders' best efforts, Antioch's size, together with its impressive redoubts, foiled any attempt to force its submission. This impasse left the Christian forces in a precarious situation: they could neither capture the city by assault, force its surrender, nor move on to Jerusalem. This resulted in an extended (eighth month) siege during which thousands of stranded and ill-supplied crusaders died of exposure, disease, and starvation.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

<sup>24</sup> Dana C. Munro, *Letters of the Crusaders* (Pennsylvania: Longmans, 1902), 6.

<sup>25</sup> Dass, *The Deeds of the Franks*, 53.

The stalemate outside Antioch lasted until the night of June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1098, when an Armenian defector helped a small Christian party scale the city's walls and open the gates from within.<sup>26</sup> With the walls breached, the crusaders were finally able to capture and sack Antioch. However, once inside, their momentum stalled as they themselves were quickly besieged by a Turkish relief force.<sup>27</sup> Trapped within the city they had just captured, the crusaders offered terms of surrender which were swiftly rejected by the newly arrived army intent on the Christians' destruction. Following this failed attempt at parley, the crusaders, who were slowly running out of resources and options, made a desperate sortie from Antioch and, bolstered by the belief that they had recently discovered the Sacred Lance (the spear reputed to have pierced Christ's side), won a surprising victory against an army that was double their size.<sup>28</sup>

Several months after this unlikely victory, the surviving crusaders pressed on, leaving Bohemond behind to govern Antioch. This army travelled down the coast of the Levant, passing through Boyrout, Caesarea, Jaffa, and Ramla, and arrived outside Jerusalem in June 1099. After an initial failure to capture the Holy City by assault, the crusaders famously marched barefoot around the walls and offered a collective prayer before commencing what was the final push. In mid-July, Christian forces entered Jerusalem and began the infamous massacre of its inhabitants.<sup>29</sup> Following the city's successful capture, the crusaders won a final military confrontation at the battle of Ascalon against an Egyptian relief army led by the vizir Al-Afdal. This victory is considered the last official action of the First Crusade after which many Christian knights returned to Europe, leaving those who remained to defend the recently established

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<sup>26</sup> This action is attributed to an Armenian Christian named *Firouz*.

<sup>27</sup> Dass, *The Deeds of the Franks*, 67-75.

<sup>28</sup> This force was led by Kerbogha, the Atabeg of Mosul. *Ibid*, 86-88.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 104-106.

crusader kingdoms – the County of Edessa, the Principality of Antioch, the Kingdom of Jerusalem, and the County of Tripoli.<sup>30</sup>

### **The *Chanson de Geste***

Any examination of the Middle Age’s epic tradition, in its various forms and languages, is inherently reliant on a peculiar contradiction. This paradox stems from the fact that these poems, or *chansons de geste*, are both simple and complex: their simplicity derives from a primitive oral origin, while a more cultivated side is apparent in later literary forms. So on the one hand, these works must be understood as a part of an ancient oral tradition that was subject to *mouvance* – a process of authorial renewal or reinvention – in which the story’s main plotlines, episodes, and heroes were preserved through feats of memory as part of a *performance*.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, they must also be understood as written works that were deeply influenced by stylistic variation as they moved into the literary sphere and became *texts*.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the analysis of the Epic, or any work that falls under the umbrella of the epic tradition, must reconcile itself to an inherent duality. Much of the genre’s power and emotion comes from its oral roots, together with the potential associated with the performative; however, its careful assembly and structure points to a consciousness and clarity inherent to works of literature.<sup>33</sup>

The term “*chanson de geste*” (song of deeds) refers to an Old French epic poem, originally composed between the 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century, that focuses on the major events and personages of

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<sup>30</sup> Armelle Leclercq, *Portraits croisés : L'Image des Francs et des Musulmans dans les textes sur la Première Croisade : Chroniques latines et arabes, chansons de geste françaises des XI<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Champion, 2010), 19.

<sup>31</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 15; Finn Sinclair, “The Chanson de Geste”, in *The Cambridge History of French Literature*, eds. William Burgwinkle, Nicholas Hammond, and Emma Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 28.

<sup>32</sup> Alan Hindley and Brian Levy, *The Old French Epic: Texts, Commentaries, Notes* (Ktēmata: Louvain, 1983), ix-x.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, x-xii.

medieval French history.<sup>34</sup> Initially, these works were performed by bards, termed *jongleurs*,<sup>35</sup> and were more individualistic – these poems often stood alone as individual stories. Later, however, when they were committed to manuscript form, many of these poems were extended and their narratives intertwined.<sup>36</sup> As a result, groups of *chansons* were brought together into larger collections of stories, or “cycles”, based on the interconnectedness of their themes, characters, and temporality.<sup>37</sup> The oldest of these cycles is the collection of poems referred to as the *Cycle de Charlemagne* or *Gestes du Roi* which is composed of more than ten individual songs, including popular works like *Fierabras*, *Anseis de Carthage*, and *La Chanson d’Aspremont*.<sup>38</sup>

In terms of structure, the *chansons de geste* are fairly uniform. Each poem is composed of successive *laissez* (a kind of paragraph) that are strung together to complete a narrative.<sup>39</sup> These *laissez* vary in length, contain a number of individually metered lines (usually in decasyllables or alexandrines), and follow assonance or rhythmic forms:

*Après parla li lere qui creoit vraiment :*  
*Elas ! et c’as-tu dit de Deu omnipotent ?*  
*Jou et tu devons prendre a dolorous torment,*  
*Nes li Sire des cius a cui li mons apent.* (A, v. 196-199)

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<sup>34</sup> These works covered a wide array of Frankish history, with their subject matter ranging as far back as the events of Charlemagne’s court in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>35</sup> Depending on the region, these medieval bards were referred to differently. In southern France they were known as *troubadours*, while in northern France they were referred to as *trouvères*.

<sup>36</sup> Norman Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens: An Interpretation of the Chansons De Geste* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), 5-6; Paula Leverage, *Reception and Memory: A Cognitive Approach to the Chanson de Geste* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 23-24.

<sup>37</sup> Stefan Erik Kristiaan Vander Elst, *The Knight, the Cross, and the Song: Crusade Propaganda and Chivalric Literature, 1100-1400* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 79; Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens*, 4.

<sup>38</sup> *Fierabras : Légende Nationale*, ed. and trans. Mary Lafon (Paris: Librairie Nouvelle, 1857); *Anseis de Carthage: chanson de geste du 13<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. Claudius La Roussarie (Paris : Société française d’édition littéraire et techniques, 1938); *La Chanson d’Aspremont, Chanson de geste du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. Louis Brandin (Paris: Champion, 1924).

<sup>39</sup> Marianne Ailes, “The Chanson De Geste”, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the Crusades*, ed. Anthony Bale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 25-26.

[After, the thief who truly believed spoke: / Alas! How could you say such wicked things about Almighty God / You and I shall hang here in eternal torment, / because we have constantly wandered and gone astray.]<sup>40</sup>

This metric framework differentiates the *chansons* from other kinds of medieval prose and dictates the vocabulary used in their composition. As a result, individual lines are tailored to fit specific patterns. Examples of this phenomenon might be the use of recurring descriptors when discussing objects, or the substitution of historical locations with imagined ones. Thus, swords are regularly described as ‘vienois’ when incorporated into *laissez* that end in the suffix ‘ois’,<sup>41</sup> while a city like “Bari” might be replaced by the fictional “Brandis” to fit into a *laisse* with the more conventional ‘is’ ending (rather than ‘i’).<sup>42</sup>

The structure of individual *laisse* is also used to indicate moments of import or heightened tension in a *chanson*’s narrative. To apply this effect the most commonly implemented techniques are *enchainement*, *similarité*, *bifuriquement* and *parallelisme*. *Laissez enchainés* continue a sequence by repeating the first line of a new *laisse* with the same line that ended the preceding one. Thus, particularly striking moments at the end of a *laisse* would be reiterated and developed in the first lines of the next one. *Laissez similaires* repeat an action over successive paragraphs but from different perspectives. These *laisse* develop important moments from alternative angles and allow for different interpretations. *Laissez bifuriquées* have the same beginning but steer the narrative in different directions. And *laissez parallèles* have a similar structure and portray the same event but from different points of view and in different ways.<sup>43</sup> Each of these techniques

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<sup>40</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 107.

<sup>41</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson (A, v. 1818).

<sup>42</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson (A, v. 322).

<sup>43</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 66.



stresses different aspects of a particular moment and clearly demarcates prominent events, actions, or decisions within a poem.

Stylistically, the *chansons* are distinct for their frequent use of rhetorical techniques such as repetition, parallelism, and hyperbole. Repetition is often employed in the use of pairings, termed *couplets*, to describe characters, objects, and places. For example, the Franks are regularly described as *noble* (noble) or *corteis* (courteous), weapons are usually *fors* (strong) or made of *fier* (iron), and nights are often *bel* (beautiful) or *clere* (clear). Similarly, the use of parallelism gives these works a uniform style of composition and creates a sense of familiarity. This kind of effect is brought to the fore in sequences where formulaic patterns are followed by different characters across various *chansons*. An example of this might be the recurring battle sequences which start with the “ritual arming” of the combatants, followed by the ragged and determined “combat scene”, and concluded with the remorseful “death blow.” Finally, the frequent use of hyperbole emphasizes the genre’s customary exaggeration. As such, armies in the *chansons* are impossibly large, heroes perform incredible feats of daring, women are exceedingly beautiful, and royal palaces contain unfathomable wealth. This aggrandizing quality gives these works much of their epic flavour and differentiates them from other, more mundane, literary forms.

In terms of content, these poems are usually set in contentious historical moments, follow the exploits of famous warriors, and describe past events that glorify the Middle Ages’ great noble families.<sup>44</sup> More specifically, *chansons de geste* are poems defined by a very narrow set of characteristics. These include attention to themes that dominated the aristocratic consciousness (warfare, pride, chivalry, piety); an emphasis on the greater good and the role of community;

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<sup>44</sup> This is apparent in the Carolingians’ representation as paragons of virtue and chivalry throughout the *Gestes du Roi*, or the frequent references to the Bouillon family as archetypal crusaders in *Le chevalier au Cigne* and *Les enfances de Godefroi*.

interaction with the feudal system and the service owed by a vassal to his lord; and a fictionalized portrait of Saracens which tends towards an inverted version of Christians. Later, however, as societal trends evolved, *chansons*' narratives became increasingly centred around popular romantic and mythical encounters.<sup>45</sup> Thus, alongside scenes of heroic prowess, religious zeal, and bloody conflict other themes began to emerge. In particular, elements of courtly culture (women, love), realism (money, urban settings), and fantasy (monsters, magic) started to appear with increasing regularity and played a more prominent role in these works. The fluid nature of the *chansons*' content is perhaps best encapsulated by Carol Sweetenham's claim that these were "an immediately accessible portrayal of a world recognizable to their audience."<sup>46</sup>

### Historiographical Review

In 1985 a major colloquium on the *chansons de geste* was organized at Strasbourg entitled: "Au carrefour des routes d'Europe: La chanson de geste, X<sup>e</sup> congrès international de la société Roncevals pour l'étude des épopées romanes" (European Crossroads: The *chanson de geste*, 10<sup>th</sup> International Congress of the Roncevals Society for the Study of Epic Poems).<sup>47</sup> This gathering produced a number of impressive works such as Robert Deschaux's "Le merveilleux dans la Chanson d'Antioche"<sup>48</sup> and Gerard Brault's "Le portrait des Sarrasins dans les chansons de geste, image projective?"<sup>49</sup> which highlighted a shift in scholarly approaches to the *chansons de geste*. More specifically, the works produced at this gathering epitomized the transition away

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<sup>45</sup> Arthur Leslie Morton, *The Matter of Britain: Essays in a Living Culture* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1966).

<sup>46</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 63.

<sup>47</sup> *Au carrefour des routes d'Europe : La chanson de Geste, Xe congrès international de la société Roncevals pour l'étude des épopées romanes* (Aix-en-provence: Presses Universitaires de Provence, 1987).

<sup>48</sup> Robert Descheaux, "Le merveilleux dans la Chanson d'Antioche", in *Au carrefour des routes d'Europe : La chanson de geste, Tome I* (Aix-en-Provence: Presses Universitaires de Provence, 1987), 431-43.

<sup>49</sup> Gerard J. Brault, "Le portrait des Sarrasins dans les chansons de geste, image projective?", in *Au carrefour des routes d'Europe: La chanson de geste, Tome I* (Aix-en-Provence: Presses Universitaires de Provence, 1987), 301-311.

from analyses of the *chansons* as historical narrative and a developing interest in the ways that these epic poems expressed contemporary realities, acted upon medieval imaginations, and reflected societal values.

Since this colloquium, scholars of the *chansons* have used the views engendered at Strasbourg as a starting point for their own research.<sup>50</sup> Norman Daniel, in his book *Heroes and Saracens: An Interpretation of the Chanson de Geste*, analyzes medieval European attitudes towards the Saracen and Islam.<sup>51</sup> His work is primarily interested in unofficial/colloquial approaches and, in order to interpret them, turns to an examination of the *chansons de geste*. He specifies how the poets of the *chansons* seem to show no interest in the realities of the Saracen culture or religion and instead choose to see this world as an extension of Christian society. As such, Daniel views the *chansons* as works of fiction that were intentionally isolated from, and rarely influenced by, contemporary knowledge of the Saracen or theological attitudes towards Islam, suggesting that these texts replaced fact with the more compelling imaginary to create an entertaining narrative.

Carol Sweetenham and Susan Edgington's introduction to their recent translation of the *Chanson d'Antioche* into English entitled *The Chanson d'Antioche: An Old French Account of the First Crusade* looks at the poem's textual history, validity as a historical source, and value as a literary work. They address the most recent scholarly interpretations regarding the *Antioche's* composition and suggest that extant manuscript versions of the text emerged from a re-working of a "proto-*Chanson d'Antioche*" during the last quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> or early in the 13<sup>th</sup>-century, after

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<sup>50</sup> Duparc-Quioc, *Le cycle de la croisade*; Robert F. Cook, *Chanson d'Antioche, chanson de geste: le cycle de la croisade est-il épique?* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1980); Paul Bancourt, *Les musulmans dans les chansons de geste du cycle du roi* (2 vols, Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1982); Jessie Crosland, *The Old French Epic* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1971).

<sup>51</sup> Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens*.

which the *Chétifs* and *Jérusalem* were added to this modified version by a later *remanieur*.<sup>52</sup> Further, they touch on the controversy surrounding the *Chanson d'Antioche*'s authorship, espousing the view that the poem was heavily influenced by Robert the Monk's *Historia Hierosolymitanae* and Albert of Aachen's *Historia Hierosolymitanae expeditionis*.<sup>53</sup> And finally, they agree with recent views on the poem's validity as a historical source, suggesting that its value remains as a dramatic work that contains, at best, "some distant echoes from 1095 that need to be treated with great caution as a guide to actual events."<sup>54</sup>

Finally, Stephane Vander Elst's recent publication, *The Knight, the Cross, and the Song: Crusade Propaganda and Chivalric Literature 1100-1400*, re-conceptualizes the role epic and romantic literature in relocating our understanding of crusader motivation.<sup>55</sup> His book looks at the *chanson de geste*, together with the genre of chivalric romances, as works intentionally composed in exhortatory fashion. As with most recent scholarship on the *chansons*, Vander Elst is primarily interested in the ways these poems influenced their medieval audiences, and, in this case, how these influences had temporal implications. Most importantly, he highlights that these works intentionally present the crusade as a spiritual, moral, and adventurous endeavour to entertain and appeal to their audiences. Impressively, his approach to the motivating role of the *chansons* has looked at an aspect of the crusading movement previously considered to be the prerogative of political, economic, and social motivations and convincingly introduced a new facet through literary and imaginative means.

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<sup>52</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 13-15.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

<sup>55</sup> Vander Elst, *The Knight, the Cross, and the Song*, 1-4.

When looking at the historiography of the *Chanson d'Antioche*, much of the scholarship has attempted to determine the poem's value as a source. In doing so, analyses have generally followed one of two approaches. The first, which will be referred to as the "old school", championed by historians such as Paulin Paris,<sup>56</sup> Gaston Paris,<sup>57</sup> and Joseph Bédier<sup>58</sup> argues that the *Chanson d'Antioche* should be viewed as a historical document which provides a realistic and unfiltered guide to the events of the First Crusade. While the second, referred to as the "new school", associated with scholars such as Suzanne Duparc-Quioc,<sup>59</sup> Henning Krauss,<sup>60</sup> and Anouar Hatem<sup>61</sup> argues that this interpretation of the text is untenable. Instead, the new school, now the academic orthodoxy, sees the *Chanson d'Antioche* as a work that provides fascinating insights into contemporary mentalities.

The new school's primary issue with the old is a methodological one. More specifically, the new school argues that the old's conclusions are over-reliant on intertextual forms of evidence. This stems from the fact that the old school's assessment of the *Chanson d'Antioche* as a guide to historical events is based on a singular line within the poem in which the narrator states that "the author of the song – Richard the Pilgrim, from whom we have it – knew the names very well."<sup>62</sup> Based on this passage, despite it being the only reference to Richard in the text, or in any other source document of the period, scholars of the old school have asserted that

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<sup>56</sup> Paulin Paris, *Nouvelles études sur la Chanson d'Antioche* (Paris: L. Techener, 1878).

<sup>57</sup> Gaston Paris, *Poèmes et légendes du Moyen-Age* (Paris: Société d'Édition Artistique, 1900).

<sup>58</sup> Joseph Bédier, *Les légendes épiques : recherches sur la formation des chansons de gestes* (Paris: Librairies Honoré champion, 1908).

<sup>59</sup> Suzanne Duparc-Quioc, "La composition de la Chanson d'Antioche", in *Romania*, 83 (1962), 1-29.

<sup>60</sup> Henning Krauss, "La chanson de geste dans le système des genres littéraires", in *Les épopées de la croisade : Premier colloque international*, ed. Karl-Heinz Bender avec la collaboration de Herman Kleber (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1987), 170-176.

<sup>61</sup> Anouar Hatem, *Les poèmes épiques des croisades: genèse – historicité – localisation* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1932), 168-169.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 312.

this figure (Richard) must have participated in the First Crusade and recorded events he witnessed in epic form. Continuing in this vein, these scholars suggest that kernels of Richard's original account can be found in Grandior's reworked version and that, therefore, the poem must be understood as one of the most important sources for the analysis of events during the First Crusade, since it is, in part, a firsthand account provided by an "homme du peuple" (man of the people).

The problem with this hypothesis, which the new school rightfully points out and the old school has yet to convincingly address, is that the argument for Richard's existence, let alone authorship of an earlier versions of the *Chanson d'Antioche*, rests almost exclusively on this single line.<sup>63</sup> In a key study on the poem, Robert Cook contested the arguments in favour of Richard's authorship by showing that there was simply no concrete evidence to corroborate his existence in the first place.<sup>64</sup> Further, as noted by several scholars of the new school, the invocation of a "firsthand account" from an authoritative, unverifiable, figure is a standard literary convention of the *chanson de geste* that was regularly used to project a sense of credibility and mystique.<sup>65</sup> Thus, scholars of the new school highlight an overreliance on a single line of text, a lack of external evidence for the existence of Richard, and the genre's regular invocation of fantastical personages as authors to suggest that Richard was probably a literary fabrication. This, in turn, has led to the new school's dismissal of the *Antioche* as an eyewitness testimony and a re-categorization of the poem as a work that is firmly influenced by the ethos, style, and form of the epic tradition.

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 312.

<sup>64</sup> Cook, *Chanson d'Antioche, chanson de geste: le cycle de la croisade est-il épique?*, 1-3.

<sup>65</sup> See for example, the *Chanson de Roland's* reference to an otherwise unknown "Tuold" as its author.

So, if, as the new school suggests, the *Chanson d'Antioche* contains “little of reliable source material” and must be “treated with great caution as a guide to actual events”,<sup>66</sup> how should we analyze this text? With the dismissal of Richard as author (and the attendant theories that surround him), historians have started to look at this poem as a work that provides a more compelling and informative picture of the Middle Ages than the somewhat mundane and inaccessible accounts of the Latin Chronicles. Therefore, rather than analyzing the poem as an accurate representation of the events it depicts, scholars have turned towards the *Chanson d'Antioche* as a work that provide fascinating insights into the *milieu* in which it was performed, with their analyses focusing on the attitudes, perceptions, and cosmologies of those contemporary with its composition (circa late 12<sup>th</sup>-century). It is this new understanding of the text that I am interested in exploring.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 61.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

## CHAPTER 2

### Alterity in the *Chanson d'Antioche*

In 1978, Edward Said published a ground-breaking study on East-West dynamics entitled *Orientalism*. This book, which is now widely regarded as a foundational work in post-colonial theory,<sup>68</sup> questioned the western representation of the Orient as the ultimate other in history, literature, art, science, and culture. According to Said, Orientalism as a practice is both a generalized “style of thought” where the Orient is defined against the Occident as its inferior opposite and a “corporate institution” in which the tools of the scholar are used to subvert the Orient in European popular and academic discourses, especially in the post-colonial framework of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-centuries.<sup>69</sup> Thus, Said claims that Orientalism is an established system in which the West not only constructed and produced the Orient, but managed and repressed it through constructed power relations in tropes, images, and representations.<sup>70</sup> Most importantly, *Orientalism* created a paradigm shift in our way of seeing and knowing the Orient, or the East, and raised a number of ethical and political questions for any work that deals with this “othered” world.

Since this publication, the issue of alterity has emerged as a viable lens of analysis in medieval studies. In particular, historians such as Paul Bancourt,<sup>71</sup> Matthew Bennett,<sup>72</sup> Armelle

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<sup>68</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 2-3.

<sup>70</sup> Shehla Burney, “Orientalism: The Making of the Other”, in *Counterpoints* 417 (2012), 23-39, 24.

<sup>71</sup> Bancourt, *Les musulmans dans les chansons de geste du cycle du roi*, 1-4.

<sup>72</sup> Matthew Bennett, “First Crusaders’ Images of Muslims: The Influence of Vernacular Poetry?”, in *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 22 (1986), 101-22.



Leclercq,<sup>73</sup> Henning Krauss,<sup>74</sup> and Suzanne Akbari<sup>75</sup> have examined many of the wider trends and themes inherent to the *chansons de geste* and their interaction with foreign elements. For these scholars, the views portrayed in this medieval textuality present a complex picture of East-West relations that not only reflects contemporary perceptions, but also displays prevalent attitudes towards alterity and its place in European cosmologies and epistemologies. Using this model of analysis, the following chapter seeks to participate in an assessment of alterity specific to the *Chanson d'Antioche*, suggesting that the poem's use of literary techniques and thematic lenses to represent the Saracen reflects popular attitudes towards this othered group.

### **Martial Ability**

In the *Chanson d'Antioche*'s opening lines, the narrator declares that the poem presents a true and accurate account of events leading up to the capture of Jerusalem.<sup>76</sup> Central to this “accurate portrayal” is the Saracens’ role as the text’s antagonists:

*Nostre Sire nos rueve en Jhursalem entrer,  
La desfaee gent ocire et decoper,  
Qui Dieu ne voelent croire ne ses sains aorer  
Ne ses coumandemans oir et ascouter,  
Sa crois et son Sepucre a nule honor garder.  
Mahom et Tiervagan deveriens vergonder  
Et fondre les images et a Dieu aorer  
Et moustiers et églises et faire et restorer  
Et si del tout en tout le treü aquiter  
Que il n'i ait paien qui mais l'ost demander. (A, v. 124-134)*

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<sup>73</sup> Armelle Leclercq, *Portraits croisés: L'Image des Francs et des Musulmans dans les textes sur la Première Croisade : Chroniques latines et arabes, chansons de geste françaises des XIIe et XIIIe siècles* (Paris: Champion, 2010).

<sup>74</sup> Henning Krauss, “La chanson de geste dans le système des genres littéraires”, in *Les épopées de la croisade: Premier colloque international (Trèves, 6-11 août 1984)* ed. Karl-Heinz Bender and Herman Kleber (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1987), 170-176.

<sup>75</sup> Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

<sup>76</sup> The assertion of truth, of the validity and primacy of one's account, is a standard *topos* of the *chansons de geste*. For more see : *La Chanson d'Antioche, Composée au commencement du XIIe siècle par Le Pèlerin Richard ; renouvelée sous le règne de Philippe Auguste par Graindor De Douai, publiée pour la première fois par M. Paulin Paris* (Paris: J. Techener, 1848), 1-2; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 1-5.

[Our lord asks that you go to Jerusalem, / To kill and confound the wicked pagans, / Who refuse to believe in God and his saints, / Or listen to his commandments. / He asks you to help liberate his cross and sepulcher. / To smash and destroy Mohamed and Tervagant, / Melt down their images and offer them to God, / Restore the holy churches and ministers, / And in the process, get rid of the tribute, / So that no pagan will ever demand it again.]<sup>77</sup>

These opening lines serve two primary roles. First, they introduce the poem's subject matter: this is a story built around the religiously-motivated conquest of Jerusalem against a foreign enemy. And second, they establish a generalized picture of the Saracens: these are, first and foremost, the "wicked pagans" who deny Christ, worship a polytheistic trinity, venerate images,<sup>78</sup> destroy Christian spaces, and unjustly demand tribute.<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, however, this opening passage does more than serve these introductory purposes, it also highlights that the poem was concerned with much more than a true and accurate portrayal of the Saracen. Rather, it was interested in the way that this "othered" group was understood by its audience.

Much like the epic tradition's oral and literary roots, the *Chanson d'Antioche's* presentation of the Saracen warrior is inherently paradoxical: these men are often weak and servile, yet at times strong and imposing. However, these contradictions served an important literary function: to present these warriors as inferior to their Christian counterparts while maintaining their suitability as the text's antagonists. Essentially, the *Antioche's* author had the delicate task of demeaning Saracen warriors, but not to the point that their ineptitude detracted from the Christians' success in defeating them. To create this somewhat balanced interpretation, the poem oscillates between two different models of presentation.<sup>80</sup> Thus, some Saracens are

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<sup>77</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche* eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 105.

<sup>78</sup> A distinctly incorrect and highly offensive notion about Islam.

<sup>79</sup> A possible reference to the *jizya*, a state tax levied on all non-Muslims living in Muslim controlled lands.

<sup>80</sup> Jones, "The Conventional Saracen in the Songs of Geste", 203-205.

honourable, skilled in combat, and intelligent – their only flaw being an adherence to the wrong religion – while others are cruel, cowardly, and incompetent.<sup>81</sup>

One of the ways that the poem diminishes Saracen warriors is through their participation in unacceptable modes of combat and cowardly behaviours. Although chivalric values were far from authoritatively established during the late 12<sup>th</sup>-century, especially when compared to the 14<sup>th</sup>-century with the emergence of Geoffroi de Charny's *Livre de Chevalerie*, standards for honourable fighting did exist. According to these standards, defeat with an overwhelming numerical advantage was a sign of weakness, the use of missiles was a dishonourable military tactic, and flight was a manifestation of inherent cowardice. In particular, the use of long-range weapons was frowned upon. According to George Jones, who bases his argument on a number of medieval texts, some as old as the 10<sup>th</sup>-century, the use of this kind of weaponry failed to meet the period's martial standards and their use signified a form of inferiority: "twelfth century knights scorned the use of missiles partly because they assumed that people threw them only when afraid to close in."<sup>82</sup> In the *Chanson d'Antioche*, Saracen armies are regularly associated with these formulae. For example, they are usually defeated in battle, despite having overwhelming numbers:

*Vesci les sarrasins ki ci sont assemble  
Ne vouses maies mie s'il i a plente.* (A. v, 10160-10161)

[Do you see the enemy over there / Do not despair, even though there are hordes of them.]<sup>83</sup>

*Mais des orgellous turs i ot mout aunee.* (A. v, 10325)

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<sup>81</sup> This is exemplified by the character Blancadrin in the *Chanson de Roland* who is described as the "wisest of heathens." *The Song of Roland*, ed. Jessie Crosland, 2, 31.

<sup>82</sup> George F. Jones, *The Ethos of the Song of Roland* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1963), 17.

<sup>83</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 297.

[However, the Turks were in huge numbers.]<sup>84</sup>

They often use poisoned arrows, unwilling to participate in close combat:

*D'un dart envienime ala ferir Odeon,  
Le Hauberc li fausa, en apres l'auqueton,  
Dedens le cors li trence le fief et le pomon. (A, v. 10467-10470)*

[Imagine a proud and wicked Turk firing a poisoned arrow, / that penetrated first his hauberk then his cotton padded jacket, / and went right through his liver and lungs.]<sup>85</sup>

*Mais li turc les encauent as ars turcois trains ;  
Plus menu n'est la pluoie des nue descendand. (A, v. 10421-10422)*

[The Turks assaulted them with their wicked bows; / the arrows falling on the French were thicker than rain.]<sup>86</sup>

And they regularly flee from battle:

*En Nike entrent Francois de la terre joie  
Et païens s'en iscirent qui Jhesus maleie. (A, v. 2229- 2230)*

[The Franks marched in, full of pride at taking the city / Meanwhile, the enemies of Christ retreated in a disorganized rabble.]<sup>87</sup>

*Or s'enfuient li Turc, Franc les vont encauçon :  
Dela Nike les vinrent en val consivant.  
Desor le Civetot, u li rocier sont grand; (A, v. 485-487)*

[So now the Turks are fleeing, and the Franks are hard on their heels. / They pursue them past Nicaea into a valley / All the way to Civetot, where there are large mountains;]<sup>88</sup>

Not only are the Saracens presented as military inferiors through their behaviours and tactics, but their comparison with the Christian knight reinforces this notion. As discussed by Marianne

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 300.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 304.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 302.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 148.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 114-115.

Ailes in her work on the *chansons de geste*, two of the honourable warriors' primary features were *prouesse* (physical prowess) and *largesse* (generosity of spirit).<sup>89</sup> In the *Chanson d'Antioche* Christians clearly display these attributes. They never have numerical superiority but nonetheless often overcome their enemies; they rarely flee, preferring to fight to the last man and die for their beliefs;<sup>90</sup> and they fight face-to-face with swords and spears, abstaining from the use of "wicked" and "cowardly" weapons like the bow.<sup>91</sup>

The negative representation of Saracen warriors extends beyond their association with diminutive formulae. Not only is this group presented as inferior based on their inability to match Christian knights in the field or adhere to western standards of honorable warfare, but they are also diminished using literary devices. At the poem's outset, when Soliman, the Emir of Nicaea, rides out of his city to meet Corbaran,<sup>92</sup> the Atabeg of Mosul, who has recently arrived to collect the Sultan of Persia's annual tribute, he is described in the following way:

*Vint... sor sa mule afeutree.  
Par devant Corbaran, se li fist enclinee.  
En après le salue de la loi forsenee. (A, v. 420-421)*

[[Soliman] Arrived on a saddled mule, / Came up to Corbaran, bowed down to him / And saluted him as the law dictates.]<sup>93</sup>

Later in the poem, when Soliman meets the Sultan of Persia, he is described in similar fashion:

*Quant Soliman l'oi, au pie li est alé ;  
Li soudan li redrece par mout grant amisté.  
A icele parole ont lor mus demandés,  
Montent li Sarrasin par les estrier dorés. (A, v. 2420-2423)*

<sup>89</sup> Marianne Ailes, "Chivalry and Conversion: The Chivalrous Saracen in the Old French Epics *Fierabras* and *Otinel*", in *Al-Masaq* 9 (1996), 1-21, 3.

<sup>90</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 120.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 146, 156.

<sup>92</sup> This character is associated with the historical personage of Kerbogha, Atabeg of Mosul.

<sup>93</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 113.

[Hearing this, Soliman prostrated himself at the sultan's feet; / The sultan picked him up to protest his obedience. / Then, the two summoned their mules / And the pair swung into their saddles with golden stirrups.]<sup>94</sup>

Two details about Soliman's portrayal in these passages warrant further investigation. First, he is described on both occasions riding a mule, instead of a horse. And second, both excerpts have him performing *obeisance* – a ritual where an individual prostrates himself at the feet of a social superior.

In the *Chanson d'Antioche* mules are used as a recurring device to represent weakness and passivity.<sup>95</sup> This likely served a dual function: in addition to profiling a literary trope intended to resonate with a highly religious Occidental audience, it was also a way of demeaning the Saracen within the poem's highly military context. In terms of religious signification, the mule, or *asne*, was a well-known symbol recognized by medieval Christians for its connection with suffering, transport, and agriculture.<sup>96</sup> This is apparent in the animal's biblical function. New Testament narratives regularly depict the mule as a "gentle" animal which is used for manual labour or to carry goods as part of a baggage train.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, the animal is consistently associated with the ultimate symbol of peace, Jesus Christ. Most notably, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, John, and Luke all describe Jesus riding a mule when he triumphantly enters Jerusalem, while Matthew's account explicitly states that Jesus was "meek and sitting upon an ass."<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 152.

<sup>95</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 113, 152, 188.

<sup>96</sup> Tova Forti, *Animal Imagery in the Book of Proverbs* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 2-6.

<sup>97</sup> *The Holy Bible: New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982), Exodus 23: 12; Genesis 42: 26.

<sup>98</sup> The animal was regularly associated with Jesus Christ, the ultimate symbol of peace. *The Holy Bible: New King James Version*, Matthew 21: 5-7; Mark 11: 1-11, John 12: 12-19, Luke 19: 28-40.

The idea that the mule was understood as a symbol of passivity is reaffirmed by intertextual evidence. In the *Chanson d'Antioche* there are several references to the mule's role in performing menial tasks. For example, when the crusaders set out for the East they "strapped supplies firmly onto mules and jennies."<sup>99</sup> Similarly, when an exchange occurs "fifteen Syrian mules" are used to transport the goods, or when the Sultan of Persia plans to steal away Christian women he suggests that he will "carry them off" on "saddled mules."<sup>100</sup> These kinds of associations emphasize the fact that the mule, as imagined by the poem's medieval Christian audience, was distinctly removed from the military sphere and understood as a symbol of service and labour.

While Saracens are regularly associated with mules, Christian warriors ride warhorses (*destriers*) – an animal traditionally associated with notions of power, violence, and knighthood:<sup>101</sup>

*Quant Harpins de Beorges les vit esporouner,  
Il apiela François, si lor prist a mounstrer:  
"Baron, vois ci les Turs ! A aus vois assembler."  
Lors brocele ceval, tos le fist randoner  
Et Ricard de Caumont laise le sien aler;  
Bauduïns de Biauvés quanqu'il pot randoner. (A, v. 470-475)*

[When Harpin of Bourges saw them coming forwards, / He spurred his warhorse forward and called to the Franks. / 'Barons, here comes the enemy! Assemble!' / Many rode their horses to meet the enemy / Richard of Caumont gave his horse its lead. And Baldwin of Beauvais spurred his mount after theirs]<sup>102</sup>

And

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<sup>99</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 124.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 112, 296

<sup>101</sup> Martin Dougherty, *Weapons and Fighting Techniques of the Medieval Warrior 1000–1500 AD* (New York: Chartwell Books, 2008), 74.

<sup>102</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 114.

*Tant con cevaus pot corre, vont as Turs asambler.  
 Et paiens sont guenci, ne volrent enconter ;  
 Jusques Civetot ne volrent demorer.  
 Li Francois les encauent, qui nes porent amer. (A, v. 479-482)*

[They threw themselves at the Turks, as quickly as their warhorses would carry them. / The Pagans were defeated and turned tail / not stopping until they reached Civetot. / While the Franks pursued their enemies with a furry.]<sup>103</sup>

The fact that Christian knights ride warhorses forces us to question the peculiar association between Saracens and mules. These contrasting images suggest that the animal was symbolically important in distinguishing between the story's protagonists and antagonists and that it was a literary tool used to link the Saracen with a lack of military prowess, social propriety, and honour. This is particularly significant within the military context of the crusade. When the poem intentionally associated prominent Saracen leaders like Soliman with small and compact animals understood for their association with peace and labour, any potential for a warlike image is lost. Thus, the mule's use as a literary device demeaned prominent Saracen warriors while elevating the position of their Christian counterparts.

The contrasting of horses and asses as an allegory for Christians vs. Muslims is just one example of the subtle ways that the *Chanson d'Antioche* reflects contemporary views of alterity. This is also accomplished through social interactions. The poem makes consistent reference to individual Saracens performing ritual *obeisance* – a cultural gesture associated with overlordship.<sup>104</sup> In describing these acts of *obeisance*, we see the attempted portrayal of Saracen characters as weak and submissive. This interpretation is supported by the text's use of language. Often, when Saracen characters perform *obeisance*, they are described “grabbing at his feet” or

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 114.

<sup>104</sup> Aparna Chaudhuri, *Willful Submission: A Study of Obedience in the Middle Ages* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2019), 5-7.



“bowing down to him”, while the use of demeaning terms like “beg” and “scrape” are suggestive of the way that this action was imagined in the poem’s performance.<sup>105</sup> These interactions were intended to highlight the Saracen warriors’ lack of combativeness and their willingness to submit. When prominent Saracen leaders who should, theoretically, be proud and powerful warriors are instead regularly described debasing themselves at the feet of others, their martial character is once again reduced.

This behaviour is contrasted with the way that Christian warriors are presented in the face of authority. When the *Chanson d’Antioche* describes Christian leaders interacting with a perceived social superior they are shown to be restrained and, if anything, resistant to these figures.<sup>106</sup> This is exemplified by the Christians’ interaction with the Byzantine Emperor. During a meeting between the crusades’ leadership and the Emperor, Tancred and Bohemond “turned and left” with neither having any desire to “be advisers and intimates of the Emperor.”<sup>107</sup> Similarly, during a meeting with the Sultan of Persia the poem describes a situation in which the Christian nobles explicitly “Refused to salute him or debase themselves.”<sup>108</sup> Thus, the text’s description of Soliman performing *obeisance* effectively contrasts the Christian’s and Saracen’s different responses to authority with one as weak and submissive and the other proud and resistant.

While the majority of the *Chanson d’Antioche* is concerned with the subversion of Saracen warriors, at times the poem is more nuanced in its representation. This is apparent

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<sup>105</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 113, 152.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 133.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 131.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 274-275.

during the final battle for Antioch where there is a distinct emphasis on the role of the “powerful” Saracen:

*Amiral encontre, ki fu nes des persis,  
La gent Nostre Signor a durement laidis  
Et la loi laidengie et les homes laidis  
Quant li quens l'aperçoit, grains en fu et maris ; (A, v. 10533-10536)*

[The Baron encountered an Emir borne in Persia, / This Emir has inflicted much damage on the soldiers of Our Lord / And blasphemed against his laws / When the noble Baron sees him, he flies into a rage.]<sup>109</sup>

And

*Tangres va par l'estor a fiere compagnie  
Pres furent de .X.M. de boine gent hardie.  
Amiral [encontre] de mout grand segnorie,  
La gent Nostre Signor ont durement laidie. (A, v. 10549-10553)*

[Tancred and his proud company joined the battle / There were nearly 10,000 good men with him. / He came up against a great and powerful Emir / who had caused great damage to the people of Our lord.]<sup>110</sup>

In these episodes there is an inversion of the Saracen warrior's role. Rather than imagining cowardly or contemptible men who ride mules, debase themselves, use ranged weapons, and regularly flee from battle, the audience is instead encouraged to imagine individuals of considerable skill who “cause great damage” to the Christian forces. These kinds of descriptions occur when there is a demand for dramatic tension. More specifically, this character type emerges when there is a need for the Saracens to gain an advantage. These kinds of occurrences are necessary for the development of narrative setbacks which, in turn, allowed for Christian reversal.

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

The exemplary Saracen warrior, however, is a complex problem for the *Chanson d'Antioche* as this character type transgresses established ideological boundaries and undermines the construct of the superior Christian knight. To deal with this, the poem is intentionally vague in its description of these powerful Saracens: their chivalry lacks detail and tends towards the obscure. Unlike other *chansons de geste* that regularly name individual Saracens as warriors of considerable skill,<sup>111</sup> the *Antioche* favours the description of unnamed “Emirs” (*Amiral*) who are “brave” “defiant” or “dangerous.” Significantly, the text’s failure to attribute the “powerful” Saracens’ military feats to recognizable characters limits their role and does much to resolve this contradiction. It is easier for an audience to associate the Saracen with a recurring and established character like Soliman who matches assumed biases than limited and obscure “Emirs.”

Yet, despite the limitations imposed on “powerful” Saracen warriors, their appearance in the poem and role in important narrative sequences highlights the Saracens’ versatility. On the one hand, Saracen warriors regularly appear as the Christians’ ideological and chivalric inferior. Their association with passivity and submissiveness, together with their use of cowardly tactics, supports this interpretation. On the other hand, individual, unnamed Saracens, are at times described with a level of prowess which allowed for the development of dramatic tension, maintaining the notion that Christian victory was a considerable achievement. Thus, Saracen warriors were generally understood to be weak and cowardly; however, their ability to appear as “powerful” warriors who hinder the text’s protagonists highlights their potential as fearsome combatants.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> See for example, the description of prominent Saracen warriors in *Fierabras* or *La Chanson d'Aspremont*.

<sup>112</sup> Henri Glaesener, “La prise d'Antioche en 1098 dans la littérature épique française”, in *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 19 (1940), 65-88, 68.

## Intellect and Emotion

In a previous study of the *chansons de geste*, Cyril Meredith-Jones argued that the Saracen represents an inverted mirror of the epic's Christian protagonist.<sup>113</sup> More specifically, he suggested that their depiction embodied "everything that the Christian holds to be perverse, wicked, detestable" as "the incarnation of all impure practices" representing a "caricature" of a "traditional type" that was "invented and reproduced endlessly."<sup>114</sup> However, an analysis of the Saracen in the *Chanson d'Antioche* reveals that these claims require a slight revision. When looking at the poem's presentation of the Saracens' intellectual profile, we might assume, on aggregate, that these are fairly uniform. Naturally, as a text intended to entertain an Occidental audience, the fool, or idiot, is the most common cognitive attribute embodied by this group; however, further analysis of the text shows that this was not always the case. At times, Saracen characters are presented as strategically sound individuals that can reason, provide psychological and emotional insight, and give surprisingly lucid analyses.

In terms of individual description, the *Chanson d'Antioche* is sparing in its use of complimentary epithets. Therefore, Saracen characters are rarely associated with terms like *sage* (sage), *preux* (wise), and *savant* (knowledgeable). However, by their actions, mannerisms, and speech, some Saracens display an impressive tactical or social understanding. The clearest example of this is Sansadoine, the Emir of Antioch's son.<sup>115</sup> Sansadoine demonstrates his intelligence on several occasions throughout the poem. In particular, he is noted for his ability to

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<sup>113</sup> Cyril Meredith-Jones, "The Conventional Saracen of the Songs of Geste", in *Speculum* 17 (1942), 201-225.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 203-205.

<sup>115</sup> The Emir of Antioch in the *Chanson d'Antioche* is *Garison*, who corresponds to the historical personage of Yaghi-Siyan.

provide reasonable counsel and make compelling arguments – skills commonly associated with wisdom and cleverness.<sup>116</sup>

During the crusaders' siege of Antioch, those Saracens trapped inside the city send an envoy to the Sultan of Persia asking for military aid. Sansadoine, who is selected for this dangerous mission, escapes the besieged city under the cover of darkness and makes his way to the Sultan's court.<sup>117</sup> Once there, he delivers a speech in which he attempts to persuade the Sultan and his courtiers to come to Antioch's aid. He begins his oration by denouncing the pagan gods (Mohammed) for failing to provide the Saracens with military victories over their Christian enemies:

*Dites, va, males gent ! Con vous voi esperdus !  
Pour coi aoures vous ices pieces de fus ?  
Or sacies que Mahon ne vaut mes .II. festus,  
Pour la fole creance ai mes houmes perdues. (A, v. 6054-6057)*

[Tell me, you idiots, what do you think you are doing! / Have you all lost your minds? / Let me tell you that Mohammed is not worth two straws. / My mistake was to believe in him and as a result I have lost my men.]<sup>118</sup>

Sansadoine's condemnation of his own "pagan" religion suggests a level of rationality and common sense. He doubts his original decision to worship Mohammed, citing his previous defeats as justification, and proclaims that the Saracen religion is worthless. His recognition of the pagan gods' failings and, by association, Christianity's superiority, demonstrates his understanding of the text's religious power dynamics. Unlike the majority of the *Chanson*

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<sup>116</sup> Thomas Conley, *Rhetoric in the European Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>117</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 212.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 219-220.

*d'Antioche's* Saracens, Sansadoine understands the fundamental differences between the two perspectives.<sup>119</sup> Mohamed is not Jesus, and his worship is therefore false.

Following his condemnation of the Saracen religion, Sansadoine continues by expounding the practical benefits of relieving Antioch:

*“Ahi, amiraus, sire, con male destinee!  
Que mes pere est ocis et la tiere reubee  
Con ont fait li francois, une jent defesfaee ;  
Roumenie ont conquise et toute la contree,  
francois ont des castiaus la gent escaitivee,  
Se consaus n'en est pris, c'est verités prouvee  
Desi qu'en Orient n'en laiseront denree,  
Jherusalem prendront, cele cité loee.”* (A, v. 84013-8419)

[‘Alas, My lord. Our fate is a wretched one. / My father’s city is under siege by the Franks, a nation of infidels. / They have taken Romania and left it in ruins; / they have destroyed the strongholds and captured its people. / They are strong, do not doubt this fact / Unless we face them together, nowhere will be safe from them / And they will succeed in capturing the Holy City of Jerusalem]<sup>120</sup>

Sansadoine’s speech demonstrates his intelligence through an ability to persuade. He makes a number of eloquent and rhetorically sound arguments in his successful appeal to send a reinforcing army to Antioch. Primarily, he is concerned with conveying the idea that Antioch’s defense is necessary for the greater good of the Muslim world, suggesting that if this city were to fall, Jerusalem and the rest of the holy land would follow – a shrewd observation, considering that this indeed occurs a short time later.<sup>121</sup> He recalls the Christian’s previous military conquests, recognizes their valour, and describes their impressive capture of various cities in the Near-East to substantiate his claims. Presenting his argument in this way, Sansadoine effectively

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<sup>119</sup> *Le Roman des eles and L’Ordene de chevalerie: Two early Old French didactic poems*, ed. and trans. Raoul de Hodenc and Keith Busby (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1983), 73.

<sup>120</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 261.

<sup>121</sup> His foresight in predicting an eventuality which is known to occur further highlights his intelligence.

frames the conflict as one impacting the entirety of the region, while pointing to the danger posed by the Christian forces to his audience's interests.

Later in the narrative, as the Sultan's relief army travels towards Antioch, Sansadoine's ability as a rhetorician stands out again, this time as he provides sound counsel:

*Sansadones consele coiemment en loie  
 Qu'il laist ester Rohais – il n'en prenderont mie –  
 ...  
 "Sire," dist Sansadones, "laisies Rohas ester.  
 Ausso le couvenroit, se nous l'aviens, garder,  
 La cite des Frans arons au retornoer ;  
 Par droite vive force les en volrons gieter. (A, v. 6750-6751, 6757-6760)*

[Sansadoine, speaking into Corbaran's ear, / Advised him that he should leave Edessa because the city was too well fortified... / 'Sire' said Sansadoine 'leave Edessa be / We could not hold the city even if we captured it. / You should instead march on to the city of Antioch / Which would easily be captured from the Franks.']<sup>122</sup>

During this narrative sequence, the Sultan's relief army, which is *enroute* to Antioch, stops and besieges Edessa. The siege, however, is described by the narrator as a waste of time for the Saracens, who will never be able to capture or hold the city. Recognizing the futility of the situation, Sansadoine once again delivers a speech: he suggests that the army abandon the ineffective and time-consuming siege of Edessa and move on to an easier target, Antioch. His peer's acceptance of this advice (they promptly move on) reinforces the notion that he has provided effective counsel.<sup>123</sup>

The intelligent Saracen, however, is the exception in the *Chanson d'Antioche*. More often, they are presented as fools who fail to recognize their shortcomings and inferior status.

<sup>122</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 233.

<sup>123</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 233-234.

One of the ways that the poem profiles this dynamic is its emphasis on the Saracens' irrationality. Several literary tropes are used to portray emotional instability in the Saracen; however, the most common ones are fainting, tearing of hair, and ranting. At times, these are all included in the same sequence. For example, when the Saracens are defeated outside of Nicaea, Soliman is so upset that he "tore his hair" was "flood[ed] with tears",<sup>124</sup> and overcome with such emotion that he "fainted four times straight off."<sup>125</sup> Moreover, these physical reactions are compounded by an emotional lament: "Alas my good city!... There is no way that I lost you without treachery of some kind! I shall die of grief if I lose all my riches too."<sup>126</sup> In this episode, the description of Soliman's physical and verbal reactions are presented so hyperbolically that it is difficult to imagine their interpretation as anything other than ridiculous and comedic. Indeed, the narrator himself responds quizzically to these behaviours, suggesting that "there is no reason to make such a fuss." These kinds of descriptions emphasize Soliman's inability to manage his emotions; in fact, he lacks the cognitive ability to rationally respond to the loss of Nicaea and his forces' defeat.<sup>127</sup>

The Saracens are also presented as unintelligent due to their lack of awareness. Often, during the preamble to battle, they are portrayed as proud and overconfident, usually prematurely predicting their success. These misguided and hasty claims serve to imagine the Saracens as fools who fail to grasp the reality of their impending doom:

*Sarrasin sont armé – li cors Deu les Maudie –  
Et juremt Mahoumet, l'uns a l'autre l'afie ;  
Mort deront Crestiens et livré a hascie,  
Quar n'i ara .I. seul ki ne perde la vie. (A, v. 1661-1664)*

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 134, 141, 149.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>127</sup> Sinclair, "The Chanson de Geste", 35-36.



[The Saracens were well armed – God damn them all – / They swore to Mohammed and to each other / That the Christians were all dead and on their way to martyrdom, / Bolstering each other’s resolve.]<sup>128</sup>

And

*Puis jura Apolin et Mahomet son dé :*  
*“Se jes trueve en bataille devant Nike end el pré,*  
*Ains i fera .M. cols a mon branc aceré*  
*Que jou ne raie quite trestoute m’ireté !”* (A, v. 2394-2397)

[And he swore by his gods Mohammed and Apollo: / ‘Just allow me to fight in the fields outside Nicaea / And see me cut off a thousand heads with my strong sword / As I regain my territory.]<sup>129</sup>

In these kinds of descriptions, the Saracens perceive themselves as morally, militarily, and religiously superior, incorrectly believing that they are destined to prevail in their conflict with the crusaders – following these statements, they invariably fail in their endeavours. Unlike Sansadoine, who understands the Saracen religion’s shortcomings and the power of Christianity, the Saracens generally fail to recognize these overarching narrative dynamics. They do not, or cannot, accept the underlying fact that Christianity is superior to their “pagan” religion, that the Christian knights are their betters, and, most importantly, that the crusaders will prevail. Thus, these sequences act as a kind of formulae that presents the Saracen as foolish through their inability to recognize their inferior status.

### Religious Portrait

According to scholarship, medieval minds seem not to have made the distinction between the various races and ethnicities of the so-called “unbelievers.”<sup>130</sup> Therefore, groups like the

<sup>128</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 136.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>130</sup> Jones, “The Conventional Saracen in the Chanson de Geste”, 204.

“Saracens”, “Turks”, and “Persians” were all considered under one umbrella as “heathen” or “pagan.” This kind of generalization is perhaps surprising, especially when considering the extensive and prolonged conflicts between Christian and Muslim powers during the 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries: the Muslim incursions into Visigoth Spain and the Christian crusading response, the various wars in Sicily and the Italian peninsula, and the numerous battles in southern France.<sup>131</sup>

Yet, despite this cultural contact the period’s literature habitually designates Muslims with the term “Saracen.” The term “Saracen” was widely understood to reference a non-Christian from the East, more specifically a Muslim, that carried negative connotations based a false etymology purported in Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae*.<sup>132</sup> This work, which was widely circulated in the Middle Ages, suggested that the use of the term “Saracen” derived from an Arab claim to a favoured line of descent (Sarah and her son Isaac) which was seen as a false claim to genealogical legitimacy.

Historically, nothing is more inexact than the identification of Muslims, defined as the followers of Mohammed, with paganism. In fact, Islam and its prophet were directly opposed to traditional pagan practices in their affirmation of monotheism, despite initial resistance from Mecca’s polytheistic community.<sup>133</sup> This misrepresentation, however, was not a mistake made in error, or an abuse of language committed with propaganda in mind, but a product of the Middle Age’s conception of the Muslim.<sup>134</sup> The reason for this, as shown by Armelle Leclercq and John

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<sup>131</sup> Beginning in the 8th century with the invasion from the North African Maghred into Visigoth Spain, Muslim forces began to expand into Christian lands. This continued with various military actions throughout the Mediterranean in regions like Sicily, Cyprus, and the Italian peninsula. These military expansions suggest that Europeans must have been aware of the Muslim world and some of its particularities. Robert Mantran, *L’expansion musulmane (VII-Xie Siècle)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969), 79.

<sup>132</sup> Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. and trans. Stephen A. Barney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>133</sup> Régis Blachère, *Le problème de Mahomet : essai de bibliographie critique du fondateur de l’Islam* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952), 46.

<sup>134</sup> Jones, “The Conventional Saracen in the Chanson de Geste”, 204.

Tolan, is the patristic fathers' influence on the period's literature. According to these scholars, the medieval tradition inherited many of the traits that featured in the writings of the early Christian and Byzantine polemicists; most notably, a distinct anti-Islamic sentiment in their polytheistic description of the Arab.<sup>135</sup> Thus, the *chanson de geste* continued the tradition of Christian literary polemic against the Occident's ancient enemy.<sup>136</sup>

The *Chanson d'Antioche* was primarily interested in distinguishing the "Saracens" from their Christian counterparts in religious terms. However, this was a delicate task for the poem, as it needed to present Islam as a *recognizably* distinct religious practice. Essentially, the poem could only define the Saracen religion in terms understandable, yet opposed, to a medieval Christian audience. The result is that the Saracens' paganism is modeled on an inverted version of Christianity. This manifested itself in several peculiar notions concerning Islam. In particular, the Saracen's representation as worshipers of an unholy trinity (Tervagant, Apolin, and Mohamed) seems an obvious, and erroneous, parody of the Christian trinity composed of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while an emphasis on their veneration of idols seems to be an attribution of a recognizably anti-Christian practice to a religious other.<sup>137</sup>

When attempting to understand the presentation of the Saracen religion, the context of the crusades is informative. This narrative framework distinguished this poem from much of the *chanson* genre because, unlike other works such as the *Roland*, *Aliscans*, and *La destruction de Rome*,<sup>138</sup> the *Chanson d'Antioche* was not framed by military reversal, nor was it set within a

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<sup>135</sup> Leclercq, *L'image des Francs et Musulmans*, 14 ; John Tolán, *Les Sarrasins*, (Paris: Aubier, 2003), 31-32. For more on this see Paul Bancourt, *Les Musulmans dans les chansons de geste du cycle du roi*, 35-37.

<sup>136</sup> Several notable authors like John of Damascus, Thomas Aquinas, and Sebeos wrote extensive critiques of Islam during the Middle Ages.

<sup>137</sup> Louchitskaja, "L'image des musulmans dans les Chroniques des Croisades", in *Le Moyen Âge* 105 (1999), 717-35, 724.

<sup>138</sup> *Roland*, ed. Adolphe d'Avril ; *Aliscans*, ed. Claude Régner (2 vols, Paris: Champion, 1990) ; *Destruction de Rome: La destruction de Rome: version de hanovre*, ed. Luciana Formisano (Florence: Sasoni, 1981).

courtly context; rather, it is a story of Christian triumph framed by a religiously oriented goal: the reclamation of Jerusalem. These differences fundamentally alter the Saracens' role in the poem and informs an emphasis on their distinction in religious, rather than physiognomic, terms – these did not need to be identified as the monstrous, horned, and beastlike men who somehow defeated the likes of Roland, Vivian, and Oliver. Instead, they needed to be emphasized as the “heathen” pagans who deny Christ and unjustly control Christian spaces.

This distinction informs the *Chanson d'Antioche*'s primary concerns when imagining the Saracen religion: highlighting Christianity's superiority. To do so, the text regularly emphasizes the Saracen gods' inferiority. In particular, there is an emphasis on their inability to overcome Christianity. One way this is done is by associating Saracen military failure with divine failure:

*Il n'i a .i. seul ki n'ait boin missaudor.  
Solmans parla primes, qui ot au cuer dolour :  
'Ahi !' Mahoumet, sire, de la vostre valour !  
Con vous ont abaisie cil de tiere Major,  
Quant ont saisie Nike et la plus haute tor !  
Dont pleurent Sarrasin pour l'amour lor seignor  
Et Solimans se pasme qui au cuer ot dolor. (A, v. 2316-2322)*

[And there was not a single Turk who was not miserable. / Soliman, who's heart was about to burst, spoke first / 'Alas, lord Mohammed! You used to be powerful; / now see how you have lost your valour. / You have been humiliated by the Franks who have captured Nicaea and its highest tower.' / All the pagans burst into tears in sympathy with their lord / and Soliman fainted, quite overcome with emotion.]<sup>139</sup>

And

*Et dist Salehadins: “Malbailli nous a-on,  
Par tout l'or Apolin ne pour mon dieu Mahon.” (A, v. 2197-2198)*

[Our leaders have let us down. / So much for our Apollo and Mohammed.]<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 150.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, 147.

In these examples, the Saracens understand their military defeats as part of a religious process: they have lost a battle; therefore, their gods have failed them. These laments take on an added dimension when understood as part of a reciprocal process: the Saracen religion is imagined as a contractual arrangement – in exchange for their worship, the pagans expect to be rewarded with victories. Thus, when they are defeated, there is an emphasis on the notions that Mohammed has “lost his valour” and “let us down”. These failures, then, reinforce the text’s underlying message: the Saracens worship a false and corrupt religion. Without the Christian faith, it appears as though the Saracens lack the impetus to emerge victorious in their struggles, highlighting what Busby has argued in relation to another *chanson de geste* (Ordene) “[that] knighthood as portrayed in literature is always... essentially Christian.”<sup>141</sup>

The pagan religion’s failure to support the Saracens is contrasted with the Christian religion which provides the crusaders with divine assistance. Towards the end of the poem, as the final battle for Antioch takes place, God sends Saint George and a host of angels to reinforce the failing Christian armies.<sup>142</sup> Unlike the Saracens, the Christians do not ask for this support, nor do they expect it; this is as part of a natural, pre-determined, process. The decision to include an episode in which the Christians receive divine support in the physical world is particularly telling of the distinction between the two religions. Not only is the Saracen religion pagan in its worship and unable to fulfil its contractual obligations; it also fails to deliver when it matters most.

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<sup>141</sup> *Le Roman des eles and L’Ordene de chevalerie*, ed. Busby, 74.

<sup>142</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 313.

Furthermore, the Saracen religion's perversion is highlighted by its embodiment of recognizably anti-Christian symbols. This is apparent in the *Chanson d'Antioche's* association between pagan worship and the devil:

*Tant ont ale li Turc, que li diables guie,  
Que Soliman encontrent el val de Jeremie. (A, v. 2232-2233)*

[The Turks, guided by the Devil, marched so much / That they encountered Soliman in the valley Guernie.]<sup>143</sup>

And

*Toute plaine sa lance l'a abatu el pré.  
L'arme de lui en portent vif diable et malfé. (A, v. 2582-2583)*

[His lance struck and killed him. / The devil quickly carried away his soul.]<sup>144</sup>

And

*Ainsi qu'il viegnent a tiere' n'i a celui ki rie :  
Li col lor son't brisie et li arme partie  
Dex conduise Francois, li Fius sainte Marie. (A, v. 3072-3074)*

[Their bodies were broken, and their souls were taken away by the devil. God guided our people, the sons of the Virgin Mary.]<sup>145</sup>

These excerpts highlight two important features of the Saracens' association with anti-Christian symbols and practices. In particular, there is an emphasis on the themes of guidance and the soul. Not only do the Saracens follow the devil's council, but they are also literally "guided" by him as they travel throughout the Orient. Further, the Saracens' souls are regularly "carried" or "taken" away by the devil when they die. The attribution of devil-worship to the Saracen, much like the attribution of idolatry, appears as a recognizable flaw. Not only do they worship false gods and

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, 148.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*, 156.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, 166.

images, but they associate with the ultimate evil. The fact that these men follow the devil (literally and abstractly) and are sent to hell emphasizes their impiousness and strangeness. The Saracens' association with Christianity's perverse aspects reinforces the idea that their religious practices were understood both as inferior and antithetical to Christian ideals.

### **Morality**

The moral portraiture of the Saracen in the *Chanson d'Antioche* is a unique and interesting feature of this work. In the poem, Saracens act in ways both acceptable and unacceptable to Occidental standards.<sup>146</sup> On the one hand, they regularly break the ethical "rules" that govern the text, while on the other hand they often regulate and reinforce ethical boundaries through the recognition of their own immoral actions and behaviours.

Most commonly, when presented as morally upright, Saracen characters are made to recognize and condemn the flawed nature of their compatriots' actions:

*A la mese sierie fu li prestres ocis...  
 Salahadins le voit, a poi n'esrage vis ;  
 Soliman apiela, le signor del país.  
 "Ahi," dist il, "ahi maleureus caitis"  
 Par Mahomet mon deu a ton mal le fesis  
 Quar cou estoit prestres deu servans revestis. (A, v. 561, 566-570)*

[The priest was killed as he sang the mass... / Saladin, saw this and was enraged. / He shouted to his lord Soliman / "Ah, you idiot!" he said / Sir, by Mohammed you have acted poorly. / You do realize that he was a priest of God in full clerical garb.]<sup>147</sup>

This description follows the defeat of Peter the Hermit and his allies at Civetot, after which one of the Saracens objects to another's actions during the battle. More specifically, Saladin, Soliman's son, confronts his father and berates him for having decapitated a Christian priest.

<sup>146</sup> See the character of Fierabras in *Fierabras. Fierabras: Légende Nationale*, ed. Mary Lafon.

<sup>147</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 116.

Here, Saladin takes the Christian side of this argument, suggesting that the priest's status as a holy man, together with the fact that he was killed while performing a religious rite (mass), made this action an immoral one. The suggestion that Saladin was "enraged" by his father's "poor" actions reflects the duality of the Saracens' moral portrait.

However, while Saracens could, and at times did, distinguish between "good" and "bad", rarely did they *act* in ways acceptable to the text's moral standards. Usually, the Saracen's actions mark them as evil, corrupt, and detestable. This is exemplified by their treatment of Christian prisoners:

*Corbarans les retint en son palais voltis ;  
Cescun fu en aniaus et en buies las mis.  
Toute jor portent pieres as mur d'araine bis  
Et traient a kierus anso coume roncis  
Ensoi furent .III. ans et avoec .XV. dis. (A, v. 814-817)*

[Corbaran kept them [the Christians] in his vaulted palace. / Each was put in chains and shackles; / each day they were made to carry stones to the walls / and drag carts like beasts of burden. / This lasted for a year and fifteen days.]<sup>148</sup>

Captivity is a recurring literary device used in the *Chanson d'Antioche* to present the Saracen as immoral. This passage describes a sequence in which a group of Christian prisoners are locked in a palace, chained, and forced into service. This excerpt contains two particularly striking details that suggest cruelty in the Christians' treatment. The description of the prisoners' physical restriction with "chains and shackles" evokes a sense of unjust captivity and highlights a loss of freedom, while their forced participation in manual labour, together with the prisoners likening to "beasts of burden", imagines the Saracens treating their captives as sub-humans.

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, 122.



Another way that the poem associated the Saracens with cruelty is their tendency to mutilate and torture Christian prisoners:

*Renaut Porcet ont pris li sarrasin felon,  
En crois l'ont estendu sor la table a bandon,  
Les bras li ont loies et les pies environ ;  
Les giereis li ont quis a soufre et a carbon  
Et a fier tout arjant et a fu et a plon  
Et les vaines des bras et puis cascun talon.  
Et Renaus brait et crie durement a haut ton. (A, v. 5370-5376)*

[The evil Saracens took Renaut Porcet. / They spread him across the table in the shape of a cross, / tying his hands and feet. / They burned his calves with ash, / a red-hot boiling iron, and molten led. / They seared the veins in his arms and heals / forcing Renaut to scream at the top of his lungs.]<sup>149</sup>

In this excerpt, the Saracens' treatment of their prisoner (Renaut Porcet) highlights a couple of notions about their moral character. First, Renaut's abuse emphasizes their cruelty and evokes a sense of outrage. These descriptions take on additional elements when considered within the context of the crusade. The specific imagery used in this excerpt, describing Renault spread like a cross, evokes the image of Christ and draws comparison to a martyr's crucifixion after undergoing extensive torture. This kind of association, in which Renault's treatment is paralleled with the Passion of Christ, serves to associate the Saracens actions with one of the most recognizably immoral and unjust events in Christianity's history. And second, their intent to exchange Renault, a mutilated and disfigured prisoner, for one of their own men serves to emphasize their untrustworthy character and duplicity.

Saracen women play a prominent role in the *Chanson d'Antioche* and allow for the development of the Saracen moral character in ways unique to a gendered approach. When

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<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, 208.

female Saracens appear in the poem it is not as objects of affection and devotion, but as characters that fulfil thematic roles. As such, the romantic encounters between beautiful Saracen women and valiant Christian knights that coloured the later, more romantically inclined, *chansons de geste* are absent.<sup>150</sup> However, their representation and role in the poem portrays a generalized understanding of Saracen women that tends towards duplicity and untrustworthiness.

When looking at the text's interaction with individual Saracen women, there are two characters that feature prominently. The first is the unnamed wife of a Saracen captain and the second is Calabre, the mother of a prominent leader (Corbaran). The captain's wife appears in the moments leading up to Antioch's capture. At the end of the city's siege, while those inside the city are preoccupied with its defense, the poem describes an episode in which her husband, Datien, who has recently converted to Christianity, provides the Christians with a ladder to scale the city's walls and open the gate. However, his wife, described as a shrewd and cunning Muslim woman, uncovers her husband's plan in the moments before its enactment.<sup>151</sup> Outraged by this perceived betrayal, she denounces his impiety and threatens to reveal his treachery to the city guards; however, before she can expose him to the authorities, Datien throws her over the ramparts:

*Contreval le trebuce, li cors est devies.  
Et li cors en .XX. lius pecoies et quases  
Diable en portent l'arme, li cors est devies. (A, v. 7436-7438)*

[He threw her over the walls and her neck snapped / And her body was smashed and shattered into 20 pieces. / Devils carried away her soul.]<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> *Anseis de Carthage: chanson de geste du 13<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. Claudius La Roussarie (Paris: Société française d'édition littéraire et techniques, 1938) ; *Raoul De Cambrai, an Old French Feudal Epic*, ed. Jessie Crossland (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1966); *Floris and Blancheflour; a Middle-English Romance*, ed. Taylor Booth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927).

<sup>151</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 243.

<sup>152</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 243.

This gruesome episode is informative for our understanding of the way that the text imagined Saracen women. In particular, there is an emphasis on their untrustworthiness. Datien is noticeably unwilling to include his wife in his plans. He “adored [her] very much” but “had to keep this plan completely secret.” Clearly, he does not trust her enough to keep his secret. Further, when Datien is forced to tell her his plans in the moments before helping the Christians scale the walls, she responds by threatening to betray him. Datien’s evident lack of confidence in his wife imagines her as untrustworthy, while her decision to betray him imagines her in opposition to Christian attitudes towards the bond between man and wife.<sup>153</sup> Where there is supposed to be love, trust, and obedience, the wife’s actions display fear, contempt, and betrayal.<sup>154</sup> Moreover, her immorality is reaffirmed by the text’s description of her death. Not only is she killed in particularly gruesome fashion, but her soul is “carried away by devils.” The concluding note underlines an animosity towards this individual; she does not simply fade away from the narrative but is dispatched in striking fashion and taken to a place reserved for the most heinous individuals.

The other female Saracen who appears in the *Chanson d’Antioche* is Calabria. Calabria’s role in the poem is twofold. On the one hand, she serves a thematic purpose by embodying the stereotypical characteristics of a Saracen witch: she is ancient (140 years old), physically dishevelled, and a master of pagan sorcery who can predict the future and interpret celestial signs (sun, moon, stars).<sup>155</sup> Her age, appearance, and proficiency in the magical arts mark her as the

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<sup>153</sup> *The Holy Bible: New King James Version*, Genesis 2:23, Romans 13:8.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, Corinthians 7: 2; Mathew 19: 4-6.

<sup>155</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 264-266.

embodiment of occult pagan practices. On the other hand, her character is also used as a narrative device to foreshadows her son's future defeat:

*Calabre vint encontre, sa mère la senee  
De la loi paienie fu mout sage  
Contre son fil ala, se li fist acolee.  
“Corbaran,” dist calabre, “or oies ma pensee.  
Tu amaines tel jent, verites est provee,  
Qui grant mestier t'avra ains qu'ele soit finee,  
Mais ne sai quant cou ert ne quele terminee.”* (A, v. 795-801)

[His elderly mother Calabre came out to meet him; / she was well versed in pagan magic. / She came up to her son and embraced him. / ‘Corbaran’ said Calabre ‘here are my thoughts. / You are coming up against powerful and strong men / Who will come to cause you trouble. / But I do not know when it will be or how it will happen.]<sup>156</sup>

These kinds of descriptions promote the Saracen woman as antithetical to Christian beliefs, this time through Calabria's association with dark arts and other supernatural forces. The text allows Calabria's pagan magic to be accurate in its foreshadowing; she is able to assess the Christian warriors' strength and correctly predict their eventual victory. However, the emphasis on her interaction with distinctly anti-Christian magic presents her as immoral and corrupt. Here, the poem imagines Calabria as a figure opposed to divine faith, allowing for the plot's advancement and the Saracen woman's reaffirmation as dangerous and untrustworthy.

In the various sections presented above, we have seen that the *Chanson d'Antioche* presents a predominantly disparaging image of the Saracen. Regularly, these fail to match the ideals of knighthood, intelligence, piety, and morality established by their Christian counterparts. However, beneath these overarching notions lies a clear ambiguity. These were not, as Sharon Kinoshita recently observed about the Saracens in the *Chanson de Roland*, simply “opposing

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<sup>156</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 122.

kings on a chess board”<sup>157</sup> who conformed to a binary opposition of “good” Christians vs. “bad” Saracens, but a group that could, and at times did, excel militarily, recognize immoral behaviour, think rationally, and conform to religious power dynamics. This dichotomy underlines the fact that the Saracens in the *Chanson d’Antioche*, while generally inferior, were not understood as a monolith, but as a versatile group with the potential to match established Christian standards.

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<sup>157</sup> Sharon Kinoshita, “Pagans are Wrong and Christians are Right: Alterity, Gender, and Nation in the Chanson de Roland”, in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001), 79-111, 83.

## CHAPTER 3

### Space

In a short essay entitled “*Des espaces autres*”, Michael Foucault first predicted that the historical outlook of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century would be dominated by space.<sup>158</sup> With time, Foucault’s prophecy was fulfilled as historians and sociologists started to pay greater attention to geographical and spatial dimensions when analyzing the past.<sup>159</sup> This intellectual shift, often called the “spatial turn”, highlighted changing attitudes towards spatial discourses and led to the abandonment of absolute models in favour of more relative approaches.<sup>160</sup> In particular, historians of the Middle Ages such as Pascale Péron, Glanville Downey, and Albrecht Classen have started to place greater emphasis on more abstract themes such as the period’s conceptualization of spatiality, or the importance of imagined space in medieval communities.<sup>161</sup> As a result, there has developed a significant body of work that aims to better understand the ways that medieval peoples understood concepts like “place” and “location” to construct imagined or described experiences.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”, ed. and trans. Jay Miskowiec, in *Diacritics* 16 (1986), 22-27.

<sup>159</sup> Paul Zumthor, *La Mesure Du Monde: Représentation De L'espace Au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Seuil, 1993); Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957).

<sup>160</sup> Angelo Torre, “Un ‘tournant spatial’ en histoire? Paysages, regards, ressources”, in *Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 63 (2008), 1130.

<sup>161</sup> Pascale Péron, *Les croisés en Orient: la représentation de l'espace dans le cycle de la croisade* (Paris: Champion, 2008); Glanville Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria: From Seleucus to the Arab Conquest* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015); Albrecht Classen, *Urban Space in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009); Albrecht Classen, *Rural Space in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012); for additional studies see: Wendy Davies, Guy Halsall, Andrew Reynolds, and Alex Langlands (eds.), *People and Space in the Middle Ages, 300-1300*, studies in the Early Middle Ages (Turnhout: Brepolis, 2006).

<sup>162</sup> Charles Withers, “Place and the ‘Spatial Turn’ in Geography and in History”, in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70 (2009), 637-58.

A particularly relevant study for our analysis of space in the *Chanson d'Antioche* is Maurice Halbwachs' book *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en terre sainte*.<sup>163</sup> In his work, Halbwachs used various pilgrims' accounts of Jerusalem's topography to develop a theory of spatial memory. More specifically, he determined that an obsessive desire to find authentic traces of Christ's legacy contributed to the transfiguration of Jerusalem's sanctuaries in the "collective memory" – a cognitive process in which a popular recollection distorts and superimposes itself over historical reality. Essentially, Halbwachs argued that the historical memory of Jerusalem's spaces was replaced in the medieval consciousness by popular, often inaccurate, literary representations. Thus, for Halbwachs, when analyzing the medieval perception of space, historical fact is less important. Instead, he suggests that scholars must turn to the idea of a "collective memory", this literary recollection that was in its own way "real", to better understand medieval peoples, concluding that "if, as we believe, collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past, if it adapted the images of ancient facts to the spiritual needs of the present, knowledge of the origin is secondary... The experience that we are studying, regardless of inherent abundance and interest, is, for us, nothing but a collective psychological experience."<sup>164</sup>

Like Halbwachs, we are not interested in comparing historical accounts with the *Chanson d'Antioche*'s narrative, nor are we concerned with the accuracy of the text's geographical, topographical, and toponymical description. We are, however, interested in the medieval

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<sup>163</sup> Maurice Halbwachs. *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en terre sainte; étude de mémoire collective* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971).

<sup>164</sup> "Si, comme nous le croyons, la mémoire collective est essentiellement une reconstruction du passé, si elle adapte l'image des faits anciens aux croyances et au besoins spirituels du présent, la connaissance de ce qui était l'origine est secondaire... L'expérience que nous étudions, quelle qu'en soit l'ampleur et l'intérêt intrinsèque, n'est, pour nous, qu'une expérience de psychologie collective." Halbwachs, *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en terre sainte*, 9.

conception of Oriental spaces and their depiction in the literary realm. In some ways, then, this chapter seeks to place itself as an extension of Halsbwach's theories by suggesting that the recollection of space in the *Chanson d'Antioche* is of particular importance as a representation of the way that locations were understood and remembered by the poem's audience. This will be accomplished through an examination of the poetic emphasis on Antioch, the description of travel, and the text's interaction with the cities of Antioch and Jerusalem.

### **The Epic Tradition**

One of the first considerations that must be made when looking at the *Chanson d'Antioche*'s interaction with spatial elements concerns its subject matter. As with other *chanson de geste*, we are given an indication of the poem's contents by its title: the *Chanson de Roland* follows Roland and his trials at Roncevaux, *Aliscans* describes a Christian defeat at the battle of Aliscans, and, following in this tradition, the *Chanson d'Antioche* focuses on the siege and capture of Antioch. It is peculiar, however, that a story set within the context of the First Crusade ends prior to the capture of Jerusalem and focuses most of its narrative on events that transpire at Antioch – especially when considering the fact that the Latin chroniclers, some of whom influenced the *Chanson d'Antioche*'s composition, all take their accounts of the First Crusade to its conclusion with the siege and capture of the Holy City.

So, why the poetic focus on Antioch? More specifically, we might consider why, in a work that expresses such a clear interest in the notion of Jerusalem's "reclamation", the epic poet made the decision to fixate on an entirely different space. Possible reasons for this shift in emphasis are the subject of extensive debate. Theories range from the possibility that the *Chanson d'Antioche* was produced as a pro-Bohemond text (he is one of the poem's main protagonists and his crusade stopped at Antioch), to the possibility that Antioch's strategic



importance and impressive physical stature marked the city as a topic worthy of its own tale (Antioch was a renowned bastion and a crucial step in Jerusalem's eventual conquest), or that Antioch's importance in the medieval imagination might have resulted in an increased interest in this space (ancient Antioch's prestige as a spiritual and political centre rivaled cities like Rome and Constantinople).<sup>165</sup> These theories, however, seem inadequate. Sweetenham remarks that "if any pro-Bohemond text does lurk beneath the surface of the *Antioche*, it is well hidden",<sup>166</sup> while the city's strategic, religious, and political relevance, although important, seems an insufficient reason for the dedication of an entire epic work. Instead, I suggest that a more likely answer to this question might be found in the characteristics that define the *chanson de geste* genre.

At the most fundamental level, *chansons de geste* were created to entertain an audience. As a result, these works relied on moments of heightened emotion, shock, and drama to produce tension. In particular, it was important that the subject matter of a *chanson* contain sufficient material conducive to the development of an engaging narrative; if a *chanson*'s plot was mundane, straightforward, and easily resolved it would fail to entertain. Therefore, a possible reason for the poetic emphasis on Antioch, rather than Jerusalem, is that the city's siege provided the basis for a more compelling story – Jerusalem's siege was relatively short and uneventful,<sup>167</sup> while Antioch's was an extended and dramatic event.

As recounted by many of the Latin chroniclers, Antioch's eight-month siege was filled with moments of hardship, desperation, and success for the crusaders. And, while these accounts may differ on their points of emphasis, they all describe the principal sequences that frame the

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<sup>165</sup> Eugene W. Kleinbauer, "Antioch, Jerusalem, and Rome: The Patronage of Emperor Constantius II and Architectural Invention", in *Gesta* 45 (2006), 125-145, 126.

<sup>166</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 45-46.

<sup>167</sup> Jerusalem was captured after a one-month siege in which the most notable events were a collective prayer, the construction of siege equipment, and the city's sack.

city's siege: the Christian force's starvation, the various skirmishes fought for control of Antioch's environs, Firouz's betrayal of the city to Bohemond, the crusaders' infiltration and capture of the city, the timely and awe-inspiring discovery of the Holy Lance, and the final confrontation against Kerbogha's overwhelming army. The repeated reference to these episodes highlights that Antioch's siege was perceived as an extended affair filled with moments of adversity and triumph for the Christian forces.

This abundance of epic material is significant for two reasons. On the one hand, these events provided the basis for an action-packed narrative. The fact that this siege contained episodes of extreme famine, armed conflict, intrigue, divine intervention, and epic victory provided ample opportunity for the development of heroism, high drama, and shock. On the other hand, these events allowed the poem to highlight themes integral to the *chanson de geste* genre.

Moments of Christian reversal, which were plentiful at Antioch, fuelled narrative progression and created opportunities for thematic development. This is exemplified by the text's description of the crusaders' starvation. This situation allowed the poet to emphasize themes of Christian sacrifice and charity. The poet "cannot pass" without "saying more about" how the "Christians suffered for the salvation of their souls", regularly informs the audience that the crusaders endured for "love of Him", and emphasises the fact that those "who did have... shared it willingly" to "help each other avoid hunger."<sup>168</sup> Similarly, defeat in combat allowed for an emphasis on important themes like Christ's vengeance and the evil Saracen. This is exemplified by the crusaders failed assault on the *Pont de Fier* (Iron Bridge), after which the poet is able to

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<sup>168</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 188.

assert that “He [God] would be avenged by his sons with swords of shining steel... on the day of judgement”, and stress the enemy’s underhanded and perverse nature as justification for their victory – the Saracens prevail in battle because they use “cunning tricks”, are “wicked cowards”, and worship of the evil “lord Mohammed.”<sup>169</sup>

Moments of Christian triumph also created opportunities for thematic development. In particular, these allowed for the assertion of Christian moral, religious, and physical superiority. For example, Antioch’s capitulation created opportunities for an emphasis on the crusaders’ righteousness. Following the city’s capture, the Christians first concern is to bring “large numbers of pagan women to the font and [have them] baptized” and have “Mass sung in the churches.”<sup>170</sup> Further, moments of Christian success allowed for an emphasis on divine intervention and God’s deliverance. This is exemplified by the crusaders’ discovery of the Holy Lance – this ancient and powerful relic is revealed to the crusaders by “angels”, a discovery that is understood as a manifestation of “God’s will.”<sup>171</sup> Finally, victory in battle allowed for an emphasis on the Christians’ physical superiority. The decisive confrontation against *Corbaran*, and the crusaders’ ultimate victory in battle, created opportunities for the description of the Christians’ ability as warriors. The poem’s heroes prevail at this crucial juncture because they are “powerful knights” with “hearts of true champions.”<sup>172</sup>

Another possible factor that contributed to the poetic emphasis on Antioch is the city’s emotional legacy. Of the various sieges that took place during the First Crusade, none lasted as long, were as difficult, or resulted in as much loss of life as Antioch. This fact is made apparent

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<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*, 115, 117.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, 256.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*, 269-270.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, 302.

in various historical accounts of the city's siege. The *Gesta Francorum* highlights that Antioch was a place of great "sorrow and misery" where "many of our men died",<sup>173</sup> Raymond d'Aguiliers reports that "calamity" and "suffering" befell the crusaders outside the city,<sup>174</sup> while Robert the Monk describes a situation dominated by "indigence" and "harshness."<sup>175</sup> Furthermore, these accounts relate that the degree of suffering at Antioch was so great that the crusaders were driven to shameful and traumatic practices. The chroniclers describe a situation in which many crusaders were forced to eat roots, women were so deprived that they were unable to provide breast milk for their children, and, perhaps most shockingly, men resorted to cannibalistic practices.<sup>176</sup>

What we gather from these kinds of gruesome descriptions is that Antioch's siege persisted in the collective memory of the First Crusade as an event associated with brutality and trauma. This recollection is significant because these conditions provided the *Chanson d'Antioche* with opportunities to stress the emotional nature of this event. Examples of this might include the poem's account of the crusaders' famine in which many are reduced to "eating their boots and shoes without seasoning" and "eating their everyday horses", while others are described "fainting with hunger" and "distended by starvation."<sup>177</sup> Similarly, the crusaders' repeated failures to capture the city and their general plight provided opportunities for an emphasis on their struggle. These are men who "suffered so much" as "many met their deaths",

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<sup>173</sup> August C. Krey, *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1921), 136-39.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid*, 139-42

<sup>175</sup> Robert the Monk, *Robert the Monk's History of the First Crusade; Historia Iherosolimitana*, ed. and trans. Carol Sweetenham (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), 123.

<sup>176</sup> Albert of Aachen tells us that some Christians participated in the flesh eating; the *Gesta Francorum* claims that cannibalism occurred but fails to associate this action with any particular group, while Guilbert of Nogent places the blame for this event on a fringe component of the crusade (Tafurs).

<sup>177</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 189.

and were forced to “fight on, regardless of the grief for their friends.” Finally, the reported cannibalism that occurred at Antioch provided opportunity for the graphic and brutal descriptions as men “roasted the flesh” of the Saracens and “ate their fill”.<sup>178</sup>

To summarize, events that transpired during the siege of Antioch provided an excellent basis for the development of narrative tension which, in turn, allowed for a thrilling and entertaining story that could highlight themes relevant to the *chanson de geste* genre. Moreover, the trauma that resulted from Antioch’s siege marked this event in the collective memory of the First Crusade as one inherently linked with notions of extreme suffering, shock, and emotion – factors that were particularly well suited to the development of an engaging story. Therefore, although the city of Antioch may not have held Jerusalem’s privileged place in European cosmologies or been the final objective of the First Crusade, the fact that Antioch’s siege provided the greatest quantity and quality of material relevant to the epic genre likely contributed to the poetic focus on this space.

### **Journey to the Orient**

Elsewhere, in a study on geographical systems in the *chansons de geste*, François Suard remarked that “epic space is traversed by movement”<sup>179</sup> and it is clear, especially when following characters in the *Chanson d’Antioche*, that the spatiality engendered by movement played a significant role in the text. In particular, the poem’s account of travel between the Occident and the Orient highlights prevalent attitudes towards the locations traversed *enroute* to the East; provides insight into the medieval understanding of geography, distance, and location;

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<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*, 200.

<sup>179</sup> François Suard, “La Chanson de geste comme système de représentation du monde”, in *Memorias de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona* 22 (1990), 241-268, 247.

and indicates which factors helped to distinguish between two formative regions (East and West).

Travel between the Occident and Orient is described in the *Chanson d'Antioche* on three separate occasions: first, during Peter the Hermit's initial pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulcher; second, during Peter's return to the holy land at the head of the "Peoples' Crusade"; and finally, during the First Crusade's voyage to the East. Peter's first journey occurs at the poem's outset when he travels from an undisclosed European location to Jerusalem:

*Il monta sur asne, prist escerpe et bourdon,  
Ainsi desi jusc'a Roume n'oublia esporon,  
Droit au moustier Saint Piere va faire s'orison.  
Puis en vait a Barlet avoec ses compagnons,  
La mer passa en barge a guise de baron,  
Et quant il vint de la, ni fist arestison,  
Les Turs, les Sarrasins trespasa a bandon ;  
Vint en Jherusalem por dieu Anontion. (A, v. 267-274)*

[He mounted an ass, gathered his script and staff, / And went straight to Rome, / Where he prayed at Saint Peter's cathedral. / Then he went to Barlet with his companions, / And crossed the sea disguised as a nobleman, / He then snuck past the enemy, / The Saracens and Turks could not stop him / And arrived in Jerusalem on the day of the Annunciation.]<sup>180</sup>

Following Peter's visit, his return is similarly described:

*Et monte sor son asne, de la s'est departis.  
Cou fu fine mervelle k'il isci del pais.  
La mer passa dans Pieres, s'ariva a Brandis ;  
A Roume en est venue courecous et maris  
L'aposte demande, si l'i a lues enquis.<sup>181</sup> (A, v. 320-323)*

[He then mounted his ass and left the city. / He had great difficulty leaving the country. / Peter eventually crossed the sea and arrived at Brandis. / From there he travelled to Rome swiftly. / And found his way to the Pope, who asked after his travels.]

<sup>180</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 109.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*, 110.

The poem's account of Peter's travel is noticeably limited – none of the locations where he stops are described in much detail and often his movements are signalled through references to individual landmarks or sites.<sup>182</sup> This is an example of what Alain Labbé calls the “*topos du voyage éclair*”,<sup>183</sup> a feature of the epic tradition in which travel between large distances is described in as few lines as possible. These descriptions contradict the realities of such travel but allow the epic poet to quickly move across vast spatial distances to tell a more concise and coherent story.<sup>184</sup>

Despite the lack of detail in these passages, they still provide the audience with a sense of geography, distance, and meaning. One of the ways that these limited descriptions conveyed additional information is with literary techniques. In describing Peter's pilgrimage, the text makes use of parallelism to highlight certain features of his journey. An example of this feature is Peter's repeated visits to the city of Rome: before his departure for the Orient, he “went straight to Rome”, and upon his return to the Occident he “travelled to Rome swiftly.”<sup>185</sup> This kind of mirrored movement is a standard aspect of rapid travel in the *chansons de geste* which emphasizes the significance of specific locations. In these excerpts, the poem's repeated allusion to Rome, and Peter's apparent haste to reach this location, stresses the city's importance to the narrative as a space linked to Peter's mission and the outset of the First Crusade.

Not only do these types of parallel descriptions signal that Rome is an important landmark, but they also develop the city's spatial quality. This is accomplished through an

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<sup>182</sup> In these descriptions there is no mention of dates, distance traversed, or time.

<sup>183</sup> “Topos of the rapid journey”. Alain Labbé, “Itinéraire et territoire dans les chansons de geste”, in *Regards sur la chanson de geste*, eds. Florence Bouchet, Daniel Lacroix, and Sebastien Cazalas (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019), 471-505.

<sup>184</sup> Péron, *Les croisés en Orient*, 25.

<sup>185</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Sweetenham and Edgington, 111.

account of Peter's actions during his repeated visits. More specifically, the fact that Peter stops in Rome to "pray" before his departure, and that he visits the Pope upon his return, links the city to religious narratives through its association with pious action and a leading religious figure. Similarly, the locations Peter occupies within the city develop this religious association. In particular, the poem's description of Peter's visitation to the church of Saint Peter, a recognizable holy site in Christian doctrine, establishes a symbolic link between Rome and Christianity's past.<sup>186</sup> In the parallel description of Peter's travels, then, the poem develops spatial awareness while progressing narrative plotlines: Rome as an important landmark and spiritual center, Peter as a legitimate religious figure, and the First Crusade as a sanctioned movement.

Other aspects of Peter's journey serve to highlight moments of spatial transition. However, this is not done using references to Oriental locations. Instead, the text signals Peter's movement into foreign spaces using specific language. When detailing Peter's journey to the East the poem fails to mention his port of call.<sup>187</sup> Given this lack of specificity, other means are used to establish the necessary transition. One of the ways that the poem signals this shift is through the use of stock phrases. In describing Peter's travel, the text vaguely mentions his "crossing the sea" to either reach or leave the Orient. In this instance, the description of movement across a body of water, together with the deliberate use of the verb *passa* (crossing), highlights that Peter has moved into new and distant spaces. Similarly, the details surrounding his travel and the language used in the poem's description highlights a sense of transition. In particular, the text's reference to his interaction with "*Turs*" and "*Sarrasins*", together with

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<sup>186</sup> This church was believed to have been founded by the apostle Peter upon his visit to Rome.

<sup>187</sup> Jean Flori, *Pierre l'Ermitte et la première Croisade* (Paris: Fayard, 1999), 79.



Peter's need to "disguise" himself" to "sneak past" the enemy, effectively highlights that Peter has entered spaces that are occupied by non-Christians and linked to a newfound sense of danger.

The description of Peter's second journey is similar to the first; however, on this occasion he travels at the head of a large group of pilgrims:

*Or s'aroute pieres, il et sa compagnie...  
Pasant Puille et Calabre at tout Romenie  
Jusqu'en Coustantinoble n'i ot regne sacie.  
Pasant le brac saint Jore a petite mesnie,  
Tant vont par lor jornees k'il ont Niq coisie. (A, v. 375, 380-383)*

[And so Peter set off with his company... / They passed through Apulia, Calabria, and the Byzantine Empire, / not stopping until they reached Constantinople. / Then, they crossed the Arm of Saint George in a small flotilla. / This journey passed quickly and they reached Nicaea in short order.]<sup>188</sup>

His return is also described following the defeat at Civetot:

*Tant a couru ses asnes les puis et les lairis  
Qu'il vint au Brac saint Jore ; a nef est outre mis  
Pieres s'en va fuiant tout seus sans compagnons  
Le grant trot sor son asne et les vaus et les mons. (A, v. 824-827)*

[Peter fled with such speed that his mule was exhausted / He reached the Arm of Saint George in no time, which he crossed by ship. / He then travelled by himself with great speed / Making the journey across the mountains, hills, and plains.]<sup>189</sup>

These accounts highlight another way that the *Chanson d'Antioche's* limited description of travel conveyed additional information. In these excerpts, the poem develops spatial quality through its use of the "epic geography." This concept refers to a geographical discourse in which a collection of toponyms (cities and regions) that were regularly invoked by the poets of the epic

<sup>188</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 112.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

tradition became recognizable for their association with established themes and systems.<sup>190</sup> For example, when heroes in the *chansons* set out on religiously oriented missions, like Louis in *Le Couronnement de Louis*, they regularly travel to Rome and visit the Pope.<sup>191</sup> Similarly, evil Saracen kings, like Baligant in the *Chanson de Roland*, are frequently associated with the distant and opulent city of Babylon.<sup>192</sup> Meanwhile, heroes who go on pilgrimage, as Charlemagne does in *Le Pelerinage de Charlemagne*, often make their way through Italy and travel by sea to Jerusalem.<sup>193</sup> As a result of these repeated references, the invocation of certain spaces in the *chanson de geste* tradition provided audiences with additional information based on their recognition: Rome as a leading religious center, Babylon as an obscure and wealthy city, and Jerusalem as an important place of pilgrimage.

The *Chanson d'Antioche* employs the epic geography in its description of Peter's second journey to the Orient. In particular, the text's reference to the regions of Apulia and Calabria contextualizes Peter's travel. These regions, which regularly featured in the epic tradition, existed in the epic geography as recognizable points of embarkment for groups travelling by sea. In works like the *Chanson d'Aspremont* and the *Chanson de Roland*, epic heroes are described as passing through these regions during their travels.<sup>194</sup> Therefore, the invocation of these spaces in the *Antioche* would have situated the audience geographically and highlighted certain aspects of Peter's travel. More specifically, the statement that Peter and his group "passed through Apulia

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<sup>190</sup> For more on the "epic geography" see: Alain Labbé "Itinéraire et territoire dans les chansons de geste", 502 ; and Bernard Guidot, "La géographie de l'imaginaire dans *Renaut de Montauban*", in *Le Moyen Âge* 103 (1997), 513.

<sup>191</sup> *Le Couronnement de Louis, Chanson de geste du XIIIe siècle*, de. Ernest Langlois, 2em édition, (Paris: Champion, 1925), 1-3.

<sup>192</sup> *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. Adolphe d'Avril (Paris: Librairie de la société bibliographique, 1877), 265-266.

<sup>193</sup> *The Journey of Charlemagne to Jerusalem and Constantinople*, ed and trans. Jean-Louis G. Picherit (Birmingham: Summa Publications, 1984), 92.

<sup>194</sup> *La Chanson d'Aspremont, Chanson de geste du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Louis Brandin (Paris: Champion, 1924), 3. *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. Adolphe d'Avril, 161.

and Calabria” suggests an understanding that these pilgrims initially made their way by land to these points of contact after which they travelled by sea to the Orient.<sup>195</sup>

Similarly, the poem’s reference to Constantinople is informed by the city’s place in the epic geography. This is a space which features in works like the *Pelerinage de Charlemagne* and *La Belle Hélène de Constantinople* as the distant, powerful, and wealthy home of the Byzantine Emperors.<sup>196</sup> Further, and most importantly for the *Chanson d’Antioche*’s narrative, this location regularly featured as a boundary between East and West. In the *chanson de geste* tradition, individuals and groups that travelled to the Orient invariably passed through this city and crossed the Bosphorus strait. Therefore, Constantinople came to symbolize an important step in the journey to the Orient, while the city’s invocation signalled to the poem’s audience that Peter and the People’s Crusade had officially transitioned into foreign spaces.<sup>197</sup>

The third case of travel and itinerary occurs with the First Crusade’s departure. The text’s description of this journey deviates from earlier examples. Rather than a departure-and-return structure, this instance of travel is instead framed as a two-step process: first the crusaders travel to Constantinople, after which they cross into Asia. Their departure from Europe is described in the following passage:

*Li baron et li prince ont lor os assemblees  
De vitaille ont les anes et les mules torsees ;  
Mout orent tos [les os] lor [armes] aprestees  
Les escieles s’en vont ; es les vous aroutees  
Le boin duc de bouillon ont les os coumandees*

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<sup>195</sup> This description implies that Peter and the People’s Crusade travelled by sea, but this group is known to have made the journey from northern France to the Orient by land.

<sup>196</sup> Alexandre H. Krappe, “La Belle Hélène de Constantinople”, *Romania* 63 (1937), 324-353, 325.

<sup>197</sup> Chroniclers of the First Crusade (Guilbert, Albert) highlight the importance of this crossing and its role in differentiating East from West. Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana: History of the journey to Jerusalem*, ed. and trans. Susan Edgington (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007); Guibert de Nogent, *The Deeds of God Through the Franks: A Translation of Guibert de Nogent’s Gesta Dei per Francos*, ed. and trans. Robert Levine (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1997).

*Et dant Huon le maine de France l'aloee  
Et il les en conduisent par mons et par valees,  
Jusqu'en constantinoble ne fisent arestees. (A, v. 1066-1073)*

[The barons and princes assembled their armies. / They mounted their supplies onto many mules and jennies; / They were well equipped with supplies and arms. / They gathered themselves and got underway. / The good duke of Bouillon was in command / With Hugh le Maine from France. / They led the armies through hills and valleys, / Not stopping until they reached Constantinople.]<sup>198</sup>

From the city of Constantinople, the crusaders continue to Nicaea:

*Or s'en va li sains peules qui la sainte crois porte  
Et pasent tant pais iluec et tante roce  
Et mainte grant montagne qui est ague et roste  
Quant ont pase le Brac, cescuns se reconforte ;  
N'arestent jusque Nique, une cite mout forte.<sup>199</sup> (A, v. 1485-1489)*

[The noble army marked with the cross got underway / And passed through many harsh lands. / These were mountainous and filled with danger. / Even when they passed the Arm of Saint George they were not comforted, / marching non-stop until they reached the powerful city of Nicaea.]

The first part of this journey is instructive for its use of another literary technique. There is a recognizable *cliché* in the text's summation of the crusaders travel. In this instance, rather than describing the various regions and cities traversed *enroute* to their destination, the crusaders' movements are instead conveyed using a stock phrase. They are described "leading their armies through hills and valleys", and "not stopping" until they reach the Byzantine capital. The crossing of *mons* (hills) and *valees* (valleys), or *plains* (plains) and *pres* (meadows), is a regular feature of travel in the *chanson de geste* which served two purposes. First, these terms carried an inherent rhythmic quality which supported the poem's metric framework and flow. Second, these

<sup>198</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 124.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid*, 132.

kinds of stock phrases effectively condensed the space between locations, emphasizing rapid and dynamic moment. This literary *cliché* manages to describe travel between vast distances in a single sentence, providing a more effective version of the *voyage éclair*. This was possible because the requisite details of the journey to Constantinople had already been established during earlier instances of travel.

The second leg of this expedition describes the Christian forces' travel from Constantinople to Nicaea. This part of the journey, however, is much more intent on conveying a new-found sense of danger in these foreign spaces. The text stresses that the crusaders travel through "mountainous [lands] filled with danger" (*Et pasent tant pais iluec et tante roce*) which results in the recognition that "when they crossed the Arm, they were not comforted" (*Quant ont pase le Brac, cescuns se reconforte*). In these kinds of descriptions, there is a recognizable shift in the language used to describe the spaces occupied by the crusaders. As the poem moves into the main narrative, we begin to see locations more regularly associated with themes of strength, danger, and power, while specific locations are increasingly described with military language. These are spaces where the crusaders engage with "villains" and need to be "best" and "powerful", while there is an increased emphasis on weaponry, battles, and other aspects of warfare.<sup>200</sup> This shift in language denotes a sense of finality for the *Chanson d'Antioche* as the poem firmly moves away from the relative safety of the Occident and definitively establishes itself in the Orient.

### **The City of Antioch**

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<sup>200</sup> The crusaders are armed with lances and shield, are determined to "avenge" God. *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 133.

In his work *La Syrie du nord à l'époque des croisades et la principauté franque d'Antioche*,<sup>201</sup> Claude Cahen provides an account of Antioch at the time of the First Crusade. In his work, Cahen portrays an imposing city located in the midst of a geographically complex region: “Those ramparts, to which the French only made insignificant modifications, struck all who saw them with admiration. With a perimeter of over twelve kilometres, they protected the city both from the side of the plain, and... climbed the slope of the Silipius, crowning the summit and passing, in a vertiginous drop, the Onoptiktes gorge, which enclosed the famous ‘Iron gate’. Its walls had three storied towers – 360 of them, according to tradition – that reinforced the gates around the city.”<sup>202</sup> More recently, Pascale Péron has used Cahen’s account of the medieval city to assess the *Chanson d’Antioche*’s accuracy, concluding that the poem’s portrait of Antioch is “more precise than most cities” in the *chanson de geste* genre.<sup>203</sup> Drawing on the poem’s supposed precision, this section uses its account of the city to examine Antioch’s place in the medieval imagination.<sup>204</sup>

The *Chanson d’Antioche*, like many of the crusade chronicles, describes Antioch’s exterior through an account of the city’s encirclement and siege.<sup>205</sup> This is done using 177 individual lines that are set into thirteen consecutive *laisse paralleles*. Each of these *laisse*s

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<sup>201</sup> Claude Cahen, *La Syrie du nord à l'époque des croisades et la principauté franque d'Antioche* (Damas: Presses de l'Ifpo, 1940), 128.

<sup>202</sup> “Ces remparts, auxquelles les Francs n’apportèrent que de insignifiantes retouches, frappaient tout le monde de d’admiration. D’un périmètre de plus de douze kilomètres, ils ne protégeaient pas seulement la ville du côté de la plaine, mais... escaladaient la pente du Silpius, en couronnaient la crête et franchissaient dans une plongée vertigineuse la gorge de l’Onoptiktes, qui fermait la fameuse “porte de fer”. Des tours de trois étages – 306, selon la tradition – les renforçaient sur tout leur pourtour. Ces remparts étaient percés de poternes de tout cote et de cinq portes autour de la ville.” Cahen, *La Syrie du nord*, 129.

<sup>203</sup> “plus précise que ne l’est en général celle des villes dans les chansons de geste.” Péron, *Les croisés en Orient*, 120.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid*, 121.

<sup>205</sup> *The Deeds of the Franks and the Other Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, ed. Rosalinda Hill, 28; Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosoliminta*, Recueil des Historiens des Croisades, oc. 364-365.

contains most, if not all, of these features: a principal Christian leader, his position outside the city, his assigned defensive structure, and a nearby geographical feature:

*Desi a Andioce ne vont pas arestant.  
A la premiere porte u li mur sont falant,  
La herbrega Tangres, li fius a la sacant,  
Et ot ensemble lui Rogier le combatant.* (A, v. 3533-3536)

[And so they rode, not stopping until they reached Antioch. / At the first gate where the walls rose up on each side / There, Tancred set up / and Roger joined him.]<sup>206</sup>

*A l'autre porte après, si con li murs ala,  
Buimons de Sesile ilueques sejourna ;  
Devant le tour autaine iluec son tref dreca.  
.IIII.M. Acupart sont en la tour de la.* (A, v. 3545-3548)

[Bohemond and his followers set themselves up / At the next gate where the walls extended. / He set himself up with his tent in front of the Afaine tower, / Which was guarded by 4000 men.]<sup>207</sup>

*Al pie de la montegne sor le mont de flate  
Li bons dus de Bretagne i fist tendre son tre.* (A, v. 3563-3564)

[The good duke of Brittany set up his tent / At the foot of the mountain on a flat hill.]<sup>208</sup>

In describing Antioch's encirclement, the text provides an account of the city's surrounding features. Often, the crusaders position themselves "at the feet of the mountain",<sup>209</sup> "on a sandy bit of ground",<sup>210</sup> "towards the bridge over the river",<sup>211</sup> "on a water-meadow",<sup>212</sup> or "on the road

<sup>206</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 174.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*, 174.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid*, 174-175.

<sup>209</sup> "*al pie de la montegne*" *Antioche*, ed. Nelson (A, v. 3563); *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 176.

<sup>210</sup> "*Ca dessus en .I. camp ki plains fu de sablon.*" *Antioche*, ed. Nelson (A, v. 3586); *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham 175.

<sup>211</sup> "*Devers l'aighe de Ferne, qui cort a mout grans saus.*" *Antioche*, ed. Nelson (A, v. 3605); *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 177.

<sup>212</sup> "*Contreval le rivage en une prairie.*" *Antioche*, ed. Nelson (A, v. 3648); *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 176.

to Jerusalem.”<sup>213</sup> These qualitative descriptions connect sections of the city’s defences with specific individuals and geographical traits. This, in turn, develops a more recognizable portrait of the surrounding landscape and allows for a more vivid interpretation of the spaces occupied by the text’s heroes. More specifically, these descriptions develop a vast topographical ecosystem for the events which take up the majority of the narrative: there is an imposing city surrounded by extensive walls, towers, and gates, a large mountain behind the city, a nearby river forded by a bridge, a number of surrounding fortresses, a road leading to the sea, and a road leading to Jerusalem. Thus, when the crusaders are described foraging for food, fighting a skirmish, arguing, praying, eating, or travelling, they are imagined doing so within the confines of a recognizable, vast, and diverse spatial framework.

Further, as various events occur during Antioch’s siege, the city’s physical surroundings are brought into greater proximity and developed by the interactions that take place in them. An example of this is the way that the poem brings the *Pont de Fier* (Iron Bridge) into greater detail. This space occupies an important place in the narrative as the only means of crossing the Orontes – a river that separates the crusaders’ camp from the city. Due to its strategic relevance, the location is coveted by both parties. Therefore, at the siege’s outset, the crusaders lead an attack on the bridge. Leading up to the assault, the poem provides a preliminary description of the structure:

*Furent faites les arcs desor l’aihge burnie :  
 Vautes i ot desure, cascune bien garnie.  
 Andioce ne crient ost de cele partie,  
 Cil pand estoit mout fors, de coube dotes mie!* (A, v. 3837-3840)

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<sup>213</sup> “*Par devers Jhursalem a la porte as bersaus.*” *Antioche*, ed. Nelson (A, v. 3604); *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 177.



[The bridge's arches were roofed over with well-built vaults, / and so well fortified with towers and battlements / that Antioch need not fear enemies coming from that area. / It was a very strong bridge, do not doubt me!]<sup>214</sup>

In this excerpt, the poem develops a much more vivid awareness of a space which plays a prominent role in the poem. As a result of this description, the audience has a much greater understanding of Antioch's surroundings: what was once a passing reference to a bridge on the Orontes is now understood in much more specific terms. In particular, there is an emphasis on the "*bien garnie*" (well-built) arches beneath and the "*aighe burnie*" (armored roof) above. These additional details help define the bridge by establishing a more thorough understanding of its structural detail, while also highlighting its solidity and impregnability.<sup>215</sup>

The text also develops this space through individual exploit. During the crusaders assault, a number of lines are devoted to a particular scene in which the Christian hero Raimbaut Creton is made to stand out. As the battle progresses, the Christians gain the upper hand and force their opponents to retreat. However, some of the Saracens are unable to make it back into Antioch before the gates close. Trapped outside the city and faced with certain death, many of the Saracens jump into the river and cling to the bridge's various arches and holds. This scenario is problematic for the crusaders who want to kill their helpless foes but are afraid of the river's currents. In this moment of indecision, Raimbaut is singled out as the first knight to wade into the water:

*Mais oer oies que fist Raimbaus Cretons li ber ;  
Ja de plus grant proecce n'ora nus hom parler...  
Il a traite l'espee, qui mout fist a douter,  
Et prise la lance a .i. fier d'outremer.  
Li ber sot bien de l'aighe, n'ot garde d'afondrer. (A, v. 4563-4564, 4568-4570)*

<sup>214</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 181.

<sup>215</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 182-184.

[Let me tell you what Raimbaut Cretons did / In an unparalleled feat of bravery... / He drew his sword of bright steel / together with his foreign lance / And leapt into the water with no thought that he might sink.]<sup>216</sup>

This episode places particular emphasis on the importance of the river and, in doing so, develops the poem's spatial quality in two ways. First, it allows for the progression of Antioch's landscape: not only is there a well-built, heavily fortified, and imposing bridge outside of the city, but we are now told that it fords a river that is both *parfonde* (deep) and *corant* (fast-flowing). Second, Raimbaut's actions, responses, and behaviours develop this space in thematic terms.

The poem's descriptions of the river highlight its interpretation as a space of danger. Initially, the Christians are unwilling to enter the river because "they were put off by its depth and power."<sup>217</sup> This trepidation is amplified by the narrator's repeated allusion to the fact that those who jump into the river might "*noer*" (drown) as they swim towards the Saracens, together with several references to men dying from a fall into the water.<sup>218</sup> These descriptions are amplified by the poem's account of Raimbaut's interaction with the river. His actions are imbued with a certain heroic quality: he draws his bright sword and courageously wades into the water. However, his initial fear, which he only overcomes due to his exceptional bravery, emphasizes the rivers as a space which represents fear and danger.

Not only does the description of Antioch's encirclement and siege develop the surrounding landscape, but it also creates an imaginary portrait of the city itself. In particular, this event provided considerable opportunity for the development of the city's defensive

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<sup>216</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 195-196.

<sup>217</sup> "*mout en furent dolant mais nus n'I ose entrer/Quar l'aighe fu parfonde, mout fist a redouter.*" *Antioche*, ed. Nelson (4558-4559); *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 195.

<sup>218</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 193-195.

qualities. Antioch is regularly described as *grant* (big) and *fors* (strong), while the poem makes repeated references to the various *posternes* (posterns), *portes* (gates), *murs* (walls) and *tours/tor/mont* (towers) that surround the city. Similarly, narrative actions develop the city's qualities. On several occasions, the crusaders try, and fail, to *prenderes* (take) or *destruire* (destroy) Antioch's walls. These kinds of failures invariably result in statements which emphasize the city's impressive stature:

*Mais li mur sont si fort que ne lor vaut nien  
Que asalir i pueent desi au Jugement  
Ancois qu'il les presisent a force n'autrement.* (A, v. 4057-4056)

[The walls were so strong that their attacks did nothing. / They could attack Antioch until the day of Judgement / And would still not be able to take the city by force or any other means.]<sup>219</sup>

Further, these kinds of descriptions are compounded by individual accounts. Often, the poem makes explicit statements which highlight Antioch interpretation as a space understood for its impregnability: “they have laid siege my city, large and extensive as it is”,<sup>220</sup> and “Your efforts are worth nothing. Antioch is immensely strong, and you will never take it.”<sup>221</sup> In these descriptions, not only is the audience left to imagine an impressively built fortress ready to withstand a siege, but Antioch is firmly associated with military themes of power and warfare.

The *Chanson d'Antioche*'s description of Antioch's siege also develops the city's interior; however, this is primarily done through narrative sequences. The poem's account of Antioch's capture describes an odd situation in which the crusaders have successfully taken the city's primary walls but failed to gain control of the inner castle – a smaller fortress within the

<sup>219</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 186.

<sup>220</sup> “*ma cite ont asise, qui mout est grans et lee.*” *Antioche*, ed. Nelson (A, v. 3692); *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 178.

<sup>221</sup> “*Mout est fors Andioce, vous n'en prederes mie.*” *Antioche*, ed. Nelson (A, v. 3663); *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 177.

city itself. This scenario is further complicated by the arrival of a Saracen relief army that begins its own siege of Antioch. Significantly, these developments result in a change of perspective for the poem's main characters who now find themselves trapped within Antioch's walls. As a result of this shift, the text attempts to provide spatial context for the areas that are occupied by its protagonists.

The most important space within the city – the one which takes center stage for much of the plot's progression – is the inner castle. This location, however, appears to fulfil two different roles. More specifically, the inner castle's representation alternates between royal palace and citadel: at times it is described as the Sultan's residence, while at others it is a defensive fortress. This duality allows the location to highlight contrasting themes and project different qualities. Usually, the space's function is determined by narrative requirements. This is exemplified by the poems account of the city's capture. When describing the crusaders' sack of Antioch, the inner castle is deployed as the "Sultan's palace" and used to highlight the Saracens' vulnerability. As such, the Saracens in the "palace" are "demoralized" by the current situation, to the point that they "abandoned their wives without so much as a farewell."<sup>222</sup>

However, slightly later in the poem, when the Saracens begin resisting the crusaders from the same location, the inner castle is re-constructed as the "citadel." When deployed as the citadel, instead of an opulent palace filled with frightened women, the space is re-imagined as a powerful military bastion from which the Saracens' "attacked them [Christians] relentlessly" and make the Franks "angry and miserable."<sup>223</sup> What we gather from the inner castle's dual representation is that the text could, at times, take a more fluid approach to space and its role in

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<sup>222</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 253.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid*, 257.

the development of narrative plotlines. Fundamental to this notion is the idea that experiences and actions associated with locations infuse space with thematic qualities.<sup>224</sup> As such, when depicting vulnerability and fear, the inner castle is deployed as a “royal palace.” Yet, when describing combativeness and resistance, the space fulfils a different narrative function and is re-imagined as the “citadel.”

The two other locations within the city that receive particular attention are associated with the Holy Lance’s discovery. During the Saracen siege of Antioch, the Christian forces trapped within the city find themselves low on supplies and outnumbered by their enemies.<sup>225</sup> Recognizing the desperate nature of their situation, they plan to break the encirclement in a final sortie. However, before this final confrontation takes place, God intercedes. More specifically, he sends the crusaders a vision in which he promises them a powerful relic that will ensure their victory (Holy Lance). In describing this episode, the text develops the location where this visitation occurs:

*En Andioce avoit de vies anciserie  
Une eglise fondee el non sainte Marie ;  
Lie prestres se dormoit par unde nuit siere,  
Devant lui vint Jhesus a grande compagnie. (A, v. 8815-8818)*

[There was in Antioch a very ancient building / An old church dedicated to the virgin Mary. / One calm night the priest was asleep there / when he was joined by our Lord Jesus.]<sup>226</sup>

And the location of the Lance’s discovery:

*La dedens Andioce quant entre I seres  
Droit au moustier saint Piere, qui del ciel a les cles,*

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<sup>224</sup> Jo Heirman and Jacqueline Klooster, *The Ideologies of Lived Space in Literary Texts, Ancient and Modern*, (Gent: Academia Press, 2013), 5-7.

<sup>225</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 266-267.

<sup>226</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 269.

*Bien pres de la masiere a destre si foure. (A, v. 8920-8922)*

[When you enter Antioch / Go to the cathedral of St. Peter, the holder of the key to heaven. / There you will find the lance that wounded God.]<sup>227</sup>

The text's interactions with these spaces, the churches of *sainte Marie* and *saint Piere*, served two purposes. First, it developed the spatial context for two significant moments in the poem, and second these episodes served to associate Antioch with religious narratives. In the first excerpt, the literary trope of divine visitation is bolstered by the text's use of spatial elements. Not only does God intercede to aid the crusaders, but he does so in "an old church dedicated to the virgin Mary." Likewise, the location associated with the Holy Lance's discovery imbues this event with symbolism. Not only do the crusaders discover an ancient and powerful relic, but they do so outside the "cathedral of St. Peter, the holder of the keys to heaven."<sup>228</sup> This additional information encourages the audience to imagine God's intervention and the Lance's discovery in greater detail, while contributing to the poem's dramatic quality by adding a sense of *gravitas* to the events described.

Further, the poem's account of these episodes re-affirms Antioch's importance as a prominent early Christian centre. Prior to the East-West schism of 1054, the Patriarchate of Antioch, an Apostolic See co-founded by Peter and Paul, was one of the five ancient seats of the Pentarchy and one which rivaled Rome and Constantinople in its claims to primacy.<sup>229</sup> These cities (Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem) were important and recognizable Christian centers headed by the highest-ranking bishops in the church. Antioch's importance to the Christian faith is also apparent in scripture. More specifically, Antioch features prominently

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<sup>227</sup> *Ibid*, 272.

<sup>228</sup> This might include pews, altars, stained glass, *etc.*

<sup>229</sup> William W. Rockwell, "Antioch", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2 (1911), 131.

in the book of *Acts* as the place where Peter did much of his early evangelization, converts were first called Christians, and Paul and Barnabas debated over doctrinal issues (circumcision).<sup>230</sup> Thus, the city's association with narratives of divine intervention, the discovery of an important relic, and two churches named after prominent Christian saints (Mary, Peter), served to highlight Antioch's importance to Christianity's beginnings and role in religious narratives. Antioch's interior, then, much like the inner fortress, is a fluid space. At times the city is associated with themes of warfare (siege, death, combat), while at others it is infused with religious quality.

### Jerusalem

The *Chanson d'Antioche* is a work dominated by two spaces. On the one hand, Antioch features prominently in terms of physical description, while on the other hand Jerusalem dominates in the abstract. Jerusalem's importance to the narrative is apparent in the poem's opening lines:

*C'est de la sainte vil, ki tant fait a loer,  
U Dex laisa sen cors et plaiier et navrer  
Et ferir de la lance et en la crois poses ;  
Jherusalem l'apielent, ki droit le viut nomer.* (A, v. 8-11)

[The Holy City, may it be praised above all, / Where God allowed his body to be punished and struck, / And was pierced by the lance and elevated on a cross; / Jerusalem to those who give it its proper name.]<sup>231</sup>

Two aspects of Jerusalem's development in this passage are noteworthy. First, the poem's initial reference to the city uses the term *sainte vil*.<sup>232</sup> And second, there is an immediate association between Jerusalem and the death of Christ.

<sup>230</sup> According to Acts 11: 26 Antioch's converts were the first to be called Christians.

<sup>231</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 102.

<sup>232</sup> This is the *Chanson d'Antioche's* very first reference to Jerusalem.

Traditionally, the first *laisse* of a *chanson de geste* are used to establish important narrative elements; often, these lines provided an indication of a poem's approach to formative locations, values, and ideas.<sup>233</sup> It is significant, then, that this excerpt was taken from the *Chanson d'Antioche*'s first *laisse* and that the poem initially uses the term *sainte vil* (Holy City) to describe the city, rather than its proper name (Jerusalem). The specific language used at this juncture signals that the poem was interested in imagining Jerusalem, first and foremost, as a religious symbol. Thus, for the *Chanson d'Antioche*'s audience Jerusalem was not a military fortress, a trading post, or an economic opportunity, it was above all else a *sainte* (holy) place. This interpretation emphasizes a claim propounded in Jean Larmat's analysis of medieval attitudes towards the city which claimed that "For all, it is the 'Holy City', as if its sacrality was indissociable from its nature, as if it was holy by definition."<sup>234</sup>

Furthermore, Jerusalem's association with Christ's death in this *laisse* highlights the city's importance as an ideological finish line for the poem's heroes. More specifically, this event is used to emphasize Jerusalem's importance to the Christian faith and the need for its reclamation. Fundamental to this notion is the idea that Jerusalem is intrinsically linked to the Occident as a part of Christ's legacy. This is the place where Jesus healed and preached to his first disciples, had his last supper with his intimates, was betrayed by Judas, arrested by the Roman governor, put on trial, crucified, solemnly buried, and miraculously resurrected. Therefore, the Saracen's occupation of this space acts as a catalyst for the poem's outset:

*Nike present par force, Rohais et Tabarie,*

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<sup>233</sup> Jean-Pierre Martin, *Les Motifs dans la chanson de geste : définition et utilisation* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Centre d'Etudes Médiévales et dialectales de l'Université de Lille, 1992), 221.

<sup>234</sup> "Pour tous, elle est 'sainte cité', comme si la sainteté était indissociable de sa nature, comme si elle était par définition sainte." Jean Larmat, "Image de Jérusalem dans la littérature française médiévale", in *Le mythe de Jérusalem du Moyen Age à la Renaissance*, ed. E. Berridot-Salvadore (Sainte-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 1995), 20.



*Andioce le grant, ki si fu raemplie,  
 Tout prise de par dieu, kil or fu en aie.  
 Jherusalem conquisent, la fort cite antie. (A, v. 108-111)*

[They took Nicaea by force, Edessa and Tiberias, / great and powerful Antioch fell too. / All of this was done in the name of God, he who died for our sins. / They captured Jerusalem, the great and ancient city.]<sup>235</sup>

And

*Adon ert essaucie sainte crestientés  
 Et ma tiere conquise mes pais aquités  
 D'ui en .M. ans sera baptises et levés  
 Et si ert sains Sepucre essaucies et levés. (A, v. 172-175)*

[They will come on behalf of blessed Christianity / To conquer and free my lands from tribute. / They will be baptized and raised a thousand years from now / And will seek out the Holy Sepulcher.]<sup>236</sup>

These excerpts underscore that Jerusalem's occupation is integral to the outset of the First Crusade. In the first passage, the text recounts the major cities lost to the Saracens during preceding centuries and, in the other, provides a prophetic proclamation of righteous warfare to recapture Jerusalem. The impetus for conquest and occupation is apparent in the text's use of language and the presentation of these lands as part of Christ's legacy. The crusaders will "seek out the Holy Sepulcher" on "behalf of blessed Christianity" and "captured Jerusalem" in "the name of our God." This, in turn, impacts how Jerusalem was understood, represented, and interacted with – these descriptions reflect an understanding that Jerusalem and its sanctuaries are fundamentally Christian lands based on their association with Christ and Christianity's beginnings. Thus, as a story predicated on the forced occupation of space, the *Chanson*

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<sup>235</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 104.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid*, 106.

*d'Antioche* expresses an understanding of Jerusalem as an end goal which keeps the narrative fluidly engaged towards its reclamation.

Another feature of Jerusalem's importance to the *Chanson d'Antioche* is its participation in the motif of outrage. This is exemplified by the poem's attention to one of the city's sanctuaries: the church of the Holy Sepulcher. This church, which is believed to have been built above the location of Jesus' crucifixion, was generally considered to be one of the most important locations in all of Christendom.<sup>237</sup> The Sepulcher's importance to the Christian faith is clearly articulated during Peter's first visitation:

*Vint en Jherusalem por Dieu Anontion.  
Quant il fu au Sepucre coucies a orison.* (A, v. 273-274)

[He came to Jerusalem on the day of the Anointment. / He then arrived at the Sepulcher to pray.]<sup>238</sup>

In this excerpt, as soon as Peter "came to Jerusalem" (*Vint en Jherusalem*) the very next line has him "arrived at the Sepulcher" (*fu au Sepucre*) and, after a brief discussion with the patriarch, prayer, and divine vision – all in the Sepulcher – he immediately departs the city. Significantly, Peter's visitation lacks peripheral detail – there are no passing references to the city's walls, layout, or other holy sites. In this descriptive absence, we recognize a similar literary feature to the *voyage éclair*; however, instead of compressing time and distance through short and concise passages, Jerusalem's spatial awareness is instead condensed. In this reduction, the text makes a concerted effort to manipulate the audience's perception of the city. More specifically, the poem's narrow focus on the Sepulcher effaces Jerusalem's other qualities, effectively reducing it

<sup>237</sup> Andrew Holt, *The World of the Crusades: A Daily Life Encyclopedia* (2 vols, Greenwood: Illustrated editions, 2019), 57.

<sup>238</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 109.

to a single location. This, in turn, allowed the text to emphasize the importance and symbolic relevance of this space.

When Peter arrives at the Sepulcher, he is shocked by the church's disrepair: "horses were stabled there and other desecrations."<sup>239</sup> The language used to describe this religious sanctuary's defacement depicts the soiling of a consecrated space. The Sepulcher's transformation into a "stable for horses and mules" is cause for "shame on all those who have besmirched God and his Saints."<sup>240</sup> As such, the Sepulcher is made to take on thematic importance by representing a wrong that demands correction. In this instance, the Sepulcher's partial presentation takes on additional significance. The text invites the audience to imagine this church through its association with dirt, uncleanness, and disrepair. In this desecration of an important Christian sanctuary, the Sepulcher is associated with the thematic motif of outrage which, in turn, contributes to the narrative's progression. The Sepulcher, and by extension Jerusalem, has been desecrated, providing justification for the crusade.

In this chapter, we have seen that the *Chanson d'Antioche* interacts with spatial elements in a number of ways. On the one hand, the poem develops space in a physical sense to create a coherent narrative. Thus, the areas traversed and occupied throughout the poem establish spatial awareness, contextualize events, and develop imaginary portraits. On the other hand, the poem reflects on various locations in the abstract. The poem's account reflects that the city of Antioch was understood as a place of great power, suffering, and triumph while Jerusalem persisted in European cosmologies as an important part of Christ's legacy, a spiritual focal point, and the final objective of the First Crusade. Therefore, the poem's development of spatiality, both in

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<sup>239</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 109.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid*, 111.

physical and abstract terms, highlights some of the ways that its audience, most of whom had never seen or experienced the Orient, understood many of the formative locations that feature in the *Chanson d'Antioche*.

## CHAPTER 4

Historians of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, intent on arguing for the “birth” of modern civilization, which necessarily defined itself in opposition to an unenlightened past, depicted the European Middle Ages (roughly 500-1500) as a period dominated by endemic and irrational violence.<sup>241</sup> Such grand narratives of a western “civilizing process” à la Norbert Elias<sup>242</sup> in which the Middle Age’s barbarism necessarily gave way to the orderly nation-state, have been questioned in recent decades by medieval and early modern historians. This scholarship has challenged received wisdom concerning violence during the Middle Ages and started to chip away at many of the foundational assumptions that have coloured the period’s historical reputation.<sup>243</sup>

However, despite the recent criticism of traditional theories, the fact that violence was an integral part of medieval life remains. Indeed, it is difficult, especially when looking at contemporary sources, to argue that violence was not deeply ingrained in the period’s ideologies, institutions, and societies. Medieval law codes, many of which were heavily based in salic law, allowed for brutal sentences such as trial by ordeal, amputation, and mutilation. The dominant religion, Christianity, promoted severe asceticism, bodily harm, and punishment for moral and spiritual transgressions. And powerful societal regulators like the chivalric code encouraged a

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<sup>241</sup> By violence, I am referring to the physical interaction that defines the modern and medieval sense of the word. That is to say, an act that “leads to the harm or even death of another person, to the destruction of an object, an institution, or a political entity.” Albrecht Classen, *Violence in Medieval Courtly Literature: A Casebook* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 14.

<sup>242</sup> This is a term that was first popularized by Norbert Elias in his publication *The Civilizing Process*. His work was intent on highlighting the emergence of a “courtly” nobility that prioritized refined behaviours and regulated warfare within a specific societal construct. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization*, ed. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939).

<sup>243</sup> Guy Halsall, *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998); Barbara Rosenwein, *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Anna Roberts, *Violence against Women in Medieval Texts* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998); Robert Mills, *Suspended Animation: Pain, Pleasure, and Punishment in Medieval Culture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006).

prickly sense of honour and rapid recourse to conflict.<sup>244</sup> As a result, violence during the Middle Ages appears to have acted as a form of social discourse in which top-down institutions – papacies, monarchies, nobility – exerted control over others.

Not only was medieval society steeped in this tradition of violence, but the period's literature was also remarkable for its gruesome illustration of warfare, suffering, and death. As noted by Richard Kaeuper, Norman Daniel, and Geraldine Heng, this is especially true in regard to the *chansons de geste*.<sup>245</sup> For these scholars, the power of the *chansons* was evident not only in how they imagined far away Christian spaces, or the tantalizing conflict with the supposedly evil “Other”, but also how they consistently used spectacular and dramatic violence to drive, colour, and develop their plots and characters. Following in the mould of these scholars, this chapter examines several bloody episodes from the *Chanson d'Antioche* to suggest that this conflict-riddled account of the First Crusade provides insights into the period's conception of violence.

### **The Tafurs' Cannibalism**

The *Chanson d'Antioche* is a poem filled with gruesome acts. The most shocking, however, is undoubtedly the cannibalism practiced by the Tafurs – a subgroup of Flemish warriors noted for their poverty, piety, and recklessness.<sup>246</sup> The poem's account of this episode attributes an act traditionally viewed with horror and revulsion to members of the First Crusade and, in doing so, reveals an ambiguous approach towards cannibalistic practices.

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<sup>244</sup> Richard Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 7-8.

<sup>245</sup> Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, 231; Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens*; Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

<sup>246</sup> The Tafurs were a contingent of the First Crusade led by an anonymous, supposedly horseless, Norman knight. Lewis A. Sumberg, “The Tarfurs and the First Crusade”, in *Medieval Studies* 21 (1956), 224-6.

During the Middle Ages, cannibalism was understood as a taboo subject. A result of this discomfort is that medieval literature regularly associated the practice with marginalized groups like Jews and Muslims. For example, William of Monmouth's *The life and miracles of St. William of Norwich*<sup>247</sup> claims that Jews practiced nefarious rituals like the "blood libel" – a religious rite in which the blood of Christian children was consumed – while Muslims were often described as wild and uncivilized man-eaters in popular *chansons de geste*.<sup>248</sup> These kinds of associations highlight the apparent unease with which medieval people viewed cannibalistic practices, emphasizing Geraldine Heng's claim that "Witches, Jews, savages, Orientals, and pagans are conceivable as – indeed, must be – cannibals; but in the 12th-century medieval imaginary, the Christian European subject cannot."<sup>249</sup>

This interpretation is reinforced by the Latin chroniclers' treatment of the reported cannibalism at the sieges of Ma'arra and Antioch. The crusaders' cannibalism during these sieges is acknowledged by the chroniclers, but it is discussed as a shameful occurrence. Both Albert of Aachen's *Historia Ierosolimitana* and the anonymous *Gesta Francorum* attempt to obscure this event with generalized reports that only "some" crusaders participated in flesh eating.<sup>250</sup> Similarly, Baldric of Bourgeuil's *Historia Iherosolimitana* tries to downplay the event with the observation that only Saracen corpses were eaten, suggesting that this made the practice less problematic.<sup>251</sup> And Guilbert of Nogent's *Gesta dei per Francos* attempts to deflect the

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<sup>247</sup> Gillian Bennett, "William of Norwich and the Expulsion of the Jews", in *Folklore* 116 (2005), 311-14.

<sup>248</sup> Francesca Matteoni, "The Jew, the Blood and the Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe", in *Folklore* 119 (2008), 182-200; Urban T. Holmes, "The Saracen Oath in the Chansons de Geste", in *Modern Language Notes* 43 (1928), 84-87.

<sup>249</sup> Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 29.

<sup>250</sup> Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana*, ed. Susan B. Edgington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 135; *Gesta Francorum*, trans. Rosalinda M. Hill as *The Deeds of the Franks and the Other Pilgrims to Jerusalem*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1972.

<sup>251</sup> Jay Rubenstein, "Cannibals and Crusaders" in *French Historical Studies* 31 (2008), 525-52.

blame for this event towards the Tafurs, a group he describes as being separate from the crusaders.<sup>252</sup> These accounts highlight an unwillingness to associate members of the First Crusade, a supposedly holy pilgrimage, with such a problematic practice. The crusaders were supposed to be fighting and defeating the evil cannibals, not participating in cannibalism themselves.<sup>253</sup>

Unlike historical accounts, however, the *Chanson d'Antioche* engages with the act of cannibalism in more complete terms. Indeed, the poem describes the Tafurs' eating of human flesh on multiple occasions. At first, when the crusaders are starving outside Antioch, Peter the Hermit tells the Tafurs to "Go and fetch those [dead] Turks lying over there on the battlefield" and "do what needs to be done." In this instance, they commit what might be described as "survival cannibalism" – a practice where flesh is consumed as a last resort.<sup>254</sup> Later, however, the Tafurs develop a taste for human flesh and begin to engage in cannibalistic practices more assertively. In these instances, their actions take on ritualistic qualities as they "exhumed the bodies of dead Saracens", "flayed the Turks", and "gobbled them eagerly without bread or seasoning." And finally, the Tafurs' cannibalism is turned into a public display. No longer content to simply flay, boil, and consume the Saracens, their actions take on theatrical qualities as they "carried them [Saracens] all up onto a hill" and "roasted the corpses" in front of "large numbers of women and girls."<sup>255</sup>

The downward trajectory of the Tafurs presents the trope of a "descent into madness." Initially, they appear as relatively ordinary crusaders who, like many others, have fallen on hard

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<sup>252</sup> Guilbert de Nogent, *Gesta dei per Francos*, 146.

<sup>253</sup> Rubenstein, "Crusaders and Cannibals", 526.

<sup>254</sup> Hans Askenasy, *Cannibalism: from Sacrifice to Survival* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1994), 1-3.

<sup>255</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Sweetenham and Edgington, 201.



times. In this instance, the poem appears to sympathize with this group and provides a moral impetus for their actions. These are men “distended by starvation” and “dying of hunger” doing “what needs to be done” in order to survive.<sup>256</sup> Almost immediately after these descriptions, however, the Tafurs engage in a more ritualized form of cannibalism. No longer content with survival, they begin to enjoy the process of preparing and consuming their enemies. As a result, the poem’s description of the Tafurs shifts. These are no longer presented as the “poor” and “deprived” crusaders who reluctantly eat the Saracens to survive; instead, they are portrayed as “wild men” who deface burial grounds, viciously skin their enemies, and indulge in the taste of human flesh. And finally, when the Tafurs start to flaunt their perversions in public spaces, they are viewed as objects of horror and revulsion. Significantly, the Tafurs’ cannibalism progressively differentiates them from the other crusaders. What began as a desperate survival tactic which could be justified, grows into a greater corruption where men become increasingly depraved and savage.

The *Chanson d’Antioche*’s response to the Tafurs’ cannibalism also presents a certain ambiguity. When the Christian leaders learn about the Tafurs’ actions, they react in the following way:

*‘Sire,’ dist Buimons, ‘n’est mie par nos nos grés,  
Ainsne lor coumandames, ja mar le mescrerés.’  
Cou est gen par une gent dont poi estes amés ;  
Li rois Tafurs les guie, si est lors avoés. (A, v. 5040-5043)*

[‘My lord’ replied Bohemond, ‘none of this can be laid at our door. / We did not order it and it wasn’t our initiative. / The responsibility lies with the King of the Tafurs, their leader. / They are a ferocious people who detest you.’]<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>257</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Sweetenham and Edgington, 201.

This excerpt can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, the fact that Bohemond denies any involvement with the event or those responsible suggests that the prevalent sentiment is one of condemnation. The Christian leader is clear that this was not “our” action, that “we” did not order it, and emphasizes that the “responsibility” for the reported cannibalism lies solely with the Tafurs, a group that he clearly distinguishes from the crusaders; they have their own “king” and are noted for their particular brand of ferocity. On the other hand, however, Bohemond’s failure to directly criticize the Tafurs’ cannibalism suggests a certain ambivalence. In an instance where one might expect disgust, fear, and contempt, there is only dissociation.

This second, non-committal, interpretation is reinforced by a meeting that takes place between the Christian leadership (Bohemond, Tancred, Godfrey) and the “King of the Tafurs”:

*Devant le roi Tafurs es les vous arestés  
 En riant li demande : ‘Coument vous contentés?’  
 ‘Par foi,’ ce dist li roi, ‘mout sui bien asenés.  
 Se jou euisse a boire, a mangier ai asés.’  
 Dist li dus de Bouillon : ‘Cierte vous en arés!’  
 De sen bon li a .II. bouciaus presentés.  
 Li rois Tafurs en bus et ses povres barnés. (A, v. 5025-5031)*

[They all came to a halt before the king of the Tafurs / and asked him Jocularly: “how’s it going?” / “In faith” replied the king “I must say I am very well fed. / There is plenty to eat, though I wouldn’t say no to a drink. / “Certainly”, said the duke of Bouillon, “have a drink” / He had two bottles of good wine from his own supply presented. / The King of the Tafurs had a swig and passed it around.]<sup>258</sup>

Based on this interaction, it appears that Godfrey (the *dus de Bouillon*) approves of the Tafurs, despite their recent behaviour. This observation is supported by the distinctly celebratory tone invoked in the *laisse*. Godfrey inquires “jocularly” after the King of the Tafur’s health and extends what might be interpreted as a hand of friendship; he offers to quench the king’s thirst

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<sup>258</sup> *Ibid*, 201.

with a “good wine” from his private supply. Significantly, Godfrey’s dialogue and actions are far from condemning; he is in no way revolted by his proximity or interaction with a man who has just eaten human flesh. In fact, it would appear that Godfrey, although unwilling to publicly declare support for the Tafurs, is encouraging of their actions and leader.

A possible reason for this favourable response is that the Tafurs’ cannibalism benefited the Christian cause. In the moments preceding this event, the poem describes a situation in which there was “little food” and “morale was low.”<sup>259</sup> The Tafurs’ actions, however, help to resolve these issues. In particular, the first instance of “survival cannibalism”, where the Tafurs consume Saracen flesh out of necessity, frames their action as one which indirectly helps to resolve the crusaders’ starvation by creating a food source. Following the Tafur-ian cannibalism, the problem of scarcity appears to resolve itself as the narrative shifts towards matters of warfare and diplomacy. Thus, the Tafurs’ actions appear to alleviate pressure caused by the crusaders’ dwindling supplies.

Further, the Tafurs’ cannibalism appears to give the crusaders a mental advantage in the battle for Antioch. Due to their acts of aggression, the Tafurs are marked as particularly ferocious; in addition to killing Saracens, they also exhume, flay, boil, flaunt, and eat their corpses in front of thousands. Through these actions, the Tafurs dominate, dehumanize, and destroy their enemies in the most public way possible. As a result, the Saracens are constantly in fear that their dead will be violated. They are “absolutely terrified” that the Tafurs will “dig up our dead compatriot, exhume him and eat him.”<sup>260</sup> This terror extends to the point that “twenty thousand pagans” inside Antioch acknowledge the possibility that the crusaders will prevail in

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<sup>259</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Sweetenham and Edgington, 200.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid*, 203.

the wider conflict: “if that is the sort of thing they are capable of we shall be humiliated and defeated.” The potential of cannibalism as a psychological weapon justifies the problematic nature of the Tafurs’ actions.<sup>261</sup> Therefore, the poem’s heroes celebrate the Tafurs who appear as an unrestrained force that can be unleashed against the Saracens at any time.

However, while the Christian response might demonstrate a kind of silent approval for the Tafurs’ cannibalism, the *Chanson d’Antioche* finds other avenues to balance this interpretation. More specifically, the poem uses the Saracen perspective to condemn the cannibals. Immediately after the Tafurs pillage the Saracens’ graves and eat their dead, those within Antioch’s walls cry out:

*Ahi Mahoumet, sire con rande cruauté !  
Bon Dex dient li Turc, se il te vient a gré  
Car pren de caus venjaance qui si t’ont vergondé.  
Quant il no jent manjuent, mout sont desmesuré.* (A, v. 4963-4966)

[Alas, Lord Mohammed, this is appallingly cruel behaviour! / Good Lord, said the Turks / Make sure you take vengeance on those who have put you to such shame / and insulted you beyond belief by eating your people.]<sup>262</sup>

Similarly, the Emir of Antioch (Garison) accuses the crusaders, whom he equates with the Tafurs, of inappropriate conduct:

*‘Signor’ dist Garison. ‘Mauvais conseil avés !  
Qui les mors desfoué, escorciés et salés esfoué  
Et puis si les mangier ausi coume lardés  
Par Mahoumet, mon dieu, durement vilonés’.* (A, v. 5036-5039)

[‘My Lord’ said Garison, ‘you have been poorly advised / in having our dead flayed and exhumed. / They are eating our dead like lard. / By Mohammed you know that this is terrible behaviour.’]<sup>263</sup>

<sup>261</sup> Sarah-Grace Heller, “Terror in the Old French Crusade Cycle: From Splendid Cavalry to Cannibalism” in *Re-Visioning Terrorism*, eds. Elena Coda and Ben Lawton (Indianapolis: Purdue University Press, 2016), 137.

<sup>262</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Sweetenham and Edgington, 200-201.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid*, 201.

Curiously, the Saracens' response to the Tafurs' cannibalism is more in keeping with what might be considered a traditional approach for a medieval Christian audience. In these accounts, the Saracens recognize that the Tafurs' actions constitute a moral and spiritual transgression. This is apparent in the specific language used by the Saracens. Thus, the Tafurs' cannibalism is "cruel" and "terrible" behaviour that is cause for "shame", while the fact that the Muslims invoke their god (Lord Mohammed) indicates a sense of spiritual violation. Further, the use of the Saracens in the *chanson* as a vehicle to critique the Tafurs' cannibalism carries additional implications: if the poem's antagonists, a group recognizable for their viciousness, cruelty, and impiety, perceive these actions as immoral, the verdict would be clear to the *chanson's* audience: the Tafurs' actions represent an unnecessary and fundamental wrong that that is cause for outrage and shame.

### **Women Warriors**

The pervasive view in medieval society was that, due to the foundational narrative of Eve in the garden of Eden,<sup>264</sup> women were deemed as manifestations of impure practices (temptation, disobedience, destruction). The conception of women as flawed and evil certainly influenced their depiction in medieval literature as objects of violence, both physical and sexual. In particular, rape was used as a stock device to accentuate power dynamics between male and female. This can be seen in both secular and religious narratives. For example, in many of Chretien de Troye's romances, the *esforcement* (enforcement) of women is seen as a test of masculinity which imparts notions of strength, power, and bravery on the rapist,<sup>265</sup> while many

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<sup>264</sup> Eve's role in the fall of man framed women as the embodiment of evil. Eve ate the forbidden fruit, tempted Adam to disobey God, and had man banished from the Garden.

<sup>265</sup> Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing and Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 3.

of the *Fabliaux* in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* contain scenes of rape which are viewed with humor.<sup>266</sup> Similarly, biblical narratives contain numerous episodes in which women are brutalized. This is exemplified by sequences in Luke 18: 10 and Genesis 2: 34 where physical and sexual violence is used against women to comment on moral and ethical behaviour.<sup>267</sup>

The *Chanson d'Antioche*, however, presents an inversion of this traditional representation. During the final battle for Antioch, there is a curious episode in which a group of women, those who initially accompanied the crusaders to the East, chose to fight alongside the male knights. The poem's account of these women warriors, and its positive response to their actions, highlights a collectivized approach to violence and a more nuanced view of gender roles during the crusade. Previously, historians have espoused the view that the First Crusade was primarily a masculine event. Recently, however, works such as Conor Kostic's *The Social Structure of the First Crusade* and Christine Meek's *Studies on Medieval and Early Modern Women: Pawns or Players?* have sought to dispel the erroneous notion that "the history of the First Crusade is, in large part, the history of mass movements of men."<sup>268</sup> This more recent interpretation, which suggests that women participated in the First Crusade and, in fact, did so in not insignificant numbers, is supported by various contemporary documents. For example, Orderic Vitalis mentioned that "rich and poor, men and women, monks and clerks" participated in, and were affected by, the First Crusade.<sup>269</sup> Similarly, Guibert of Nogent, an eyewitness to events, highlighted that "even unworthy women" took the mark of the cross and set out for the

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<sup>266</sup> Angela Jane Weisl, "'Quiting Eve': Violence against Women in the Canterbury Tales", in *Violence Against Women in Medieval Texts*, ed. Anna Roberts (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 115-37, 119.

<sup>267</sup> *The New King James Bible*, Genesis 2: 34, Luke 18: 10.

<sup>268</sup> J. A. Brundage, *The Crusades, Holy War and Cannon Law* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1991), 380.

<sup>269</sup> Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 5.

East,<sup>270</sup> while Ekkehard, the abbot of Aura, claimed that many who joined the movement did so with their “wives and offspring” in tow.<sup>271</sup>

Not only do the chroniclers suggest that women actively joined the First Crusade, but they also provide indications as to their role. Albert of Aachen, whose account takes the derogatory stance typical of monasticism, claimed that the women who travelled on crusade were prostitutes who engaged in salacious attempts to distract male crusaders; he wrote that “women and girls” joined the crusade under the guise of religious motivation when their true intention was “sexual intercourse” and “constant pleasure.”<sup>272</sup> Other accounts, however, mention that women were involved in different capacities. More specifically, Fulcher of Chartres and the anonymous *Gesta Francorum* claim that women were present at the battles of Nicaea and Dorylaeum respectively, and that they provided the crusaders with physical and mental support. Several chronicles claim that women regularly brought water to exhausted knights on the battlefield and encouraged them to fight on.<sup>273</sup> These works suggest that the women who joined the crusade were more than idle bystanders or prostitutes and that they contributed in a number of ancillary ways.<sup>274</sup>

The *Chanson d'Antioche*, however, goes even further than these historical sources by suggesting that women not only accompanied the crusaders to the East, operated as sex workers,

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<sup>270</sup> Guibert of Nogent, *Gesta Dei Per Francos*, 330. This was likely a reference to a popular practice in which participants in the First Crusade marked themselves as pilgrims by sewing a cross onto their clothing.

<sup>271</sup> Ekkehard of Aura, *Hierosolymita: De oppresione, liberatione ac restauratione Jerosolymitanae Ecclesiae*, RHC Occ. 5:7–40.

<sup>272</sup> Albert of Aachen, *Historia Iherosolimitana*, ed. Susan B. Edgington, 125.

<sup>273</sup> *Gesta Francorum*, ed. Rosalinda M. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 17; Fulcher of Chartres, *The First Crusade: The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and Other Source Materials*, ed. Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 183.

<sup>274</sup> Conor Kostick, “Women and the First Crusade: Prostitutes or Pilgrims?”, in *Studies on Medieval and Early Modern Women 4: Victims or Viragos*, eds. Christine Meeks and Catherine Lawless (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 57–68.

and supported the menfolk, but that they also actively participated in the conflict. As the poem nears its conclusion, the depleted Christian army is forced into a decisive battle for Antioch. In the preamble to this confrontation, the narrator lists the various Christian knights who exit the city (Bohemond, Tancred, Godfrey, etc.) In addition, he mentions how several unconventional parties emerge and prepare to fight. First, there is the battalion of “elderly veterans” with beards “whiter than meadow flowers” who arm themselves with “stout round shields, countless hauberks, and countless helmets.” Second, is the “squadron of clergy” with “their albs tightly belted and tucked in” who carry “such arms as they were permitted.” And finally, there is the group of “women” who “seize staffs”, “picked up stones”, and “organized themselves on the battlefield.”<sup>275</sup>

Motivated by the desperate nature of their situation, these non-traditional combatants (elderly, clerics, women) prepare to join the conflict alongside the other Christian soldiers. Significantly, however, the poet pays particular attention to the women and dedicates an entire *laisse* to their preparations:

*Signor, iceste esciele fet mout bien a oir.  
 Les dames qui alerent Nostre Signour servir  
 En miliu d'Andioce font lor conseil tenir  
 Et dist li une a l'autre, ne vos en quier mentir :  
 'no signor vont la fors pour les Turs envair  
 Mais, se Jhesus consente qu'il i doivent morir,  
 Cist gloton nos prendront, si nos feront hounir.  
 Mius est qu'ensamble o eus allons a la mort souffrir  
 Que o les Sarrasins lor voloires consentir,'  
 Toutes cries ensambles : 'ce soit a Deu plaisir'.  
 As osteussont courues pour lor bordons saisir,  
 En son lient lor guimples pour au vent referir;  
 Les plusiors vont les pieres en lor mances quellir,  
 Les autres de douce aighe font lor vaisiaus emplir,  
 Cil ki boire volra n'i porapas falir.*

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<sup>275</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 291-295.



*Parmi la porte en iscent por lor signor veir. (A, v. 10093-10108)*

[My lords, you will enjoy hearing about this squadron. / The women who had set off in service of Our Lord / got together in the middle of Antioch to discuss a plan of action. / ‘There is no point in beating around the bush’ / they said to each other, / ‘our menfolk are marching out there to attack the Turks. / But if God’s will is that they die in the attempt, / those wretches will take us captive and ruin us. / Better then to suffer death alongside our men.’ / ‘May it be as God pleases!’ they all cried in unison. / They ran to their lodging to seize staffs, / tying their wimples back to stop them flapping in the wind. / Many of them picked up stones and carried them in their sleeves; / others filled vessels with fresh water / to ensure that those who wanted a drink could have one. / They marched out of the gate to see their lords and masters.]<sup>276</sup>

The motivation of the women is rooted in their belief that the crusaders’ defeat would result in their “capture and ruin”, an outcome which appears to be worse than death. Thus, these women organize themselves, resolve to join the conflict, gather their weapons, and “marched out of the gate” to join the other combatants. The positive implications of this are underlined by the narrator informing the audience that they will “enjoy” hearing about the squadron of women and implies that their participation is divinely sponsored: “May it be as God pleases!”

Following their decision join the conflict and, if necessary, “suffer death alongside our men”, these women appear as a representation of the Christians’ absolute commitment to the crusade. As a result, the women confuse and strike fear into the enemy. When they emerge from the city and arrive on the battlefield, the Saracen leader Corbaran asks: “are these really women I see coming out now?” after which he comments “I have no idea how to get out of this one.” Similarly, his compatriot Rouge Lion, after seeing the women emerge from Antioch, admits to being “so scared.”<sup>277</sup> On the other hand, these women serve to inspire the poem’s heroes. The Christian soldiers are moved by their women’s willingness to fight and die alongside them and

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<sup>276</sup> *Antioche* ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 295-96.

<sup>277</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Edgington and Sweetenham, 295-296.

are incentivized by their presence: “their menfolk – who adored them [women] – gazed at them pale with pity. Then they closed the vizors of their white armor before scrutinizing the sharp blades of their swords. They were so upset that they swore on their faith that their womenfolk would be captured only at a high price.”<sup>278</sup> In these descriptions, the Christian knights’ sense of shame serves to accentuate the bravery demonstrated by their women while increasing the dramatic quality of the ensuing battle.

The *Chanson d’Antioche*’s portrayal of these women, however, is not limited to their preparations to join the conflict. The poem also includes an account of their active participation in combat. During his account of Antioch’s siege, the narrator mentions that “the women were raining sharp stones on them [Saracens]”<sup>279</sup> and notes that there were “innumerable noble women knocked from their horses sprawled dead and bleeding on the ground.”<sup>280</sup> Not only do they support the male crusaders by throwing missiles at the enemy from afar, but they also appear to ride horses into battle and participate in hand-to-hand fighting. The poem’s account of their active contribution further valorizes these women and emphasizes their bravery, while the graphic description of their deaths highlights their sacrifice and encourages the audience to empathize with them.

While the *Chanson d’Antioche*’s inclusion of women combatants is curious, it is not unique. Crusade chronicles also noted the presence of women on the battlefield outside of Jerusalem in 1099. In particular, William of Tyre mentions in his *Historia Ierosolimitana* that: “even women, regardless of sex and natural weakness, dared to assume arms and fought

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<sup>278</sup> *Ibid*, 311.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid*, 310

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid*, 312

manfully far beyond their strength.”<sup>281</sup> His account, while not an eyewitness testimonial, has recently been used by Karen Caspi-Reisfeld to discuss conventional female roles during the crusade. Her account provides similar insights to this study concerning the participation of women in combat. She uses William of Tyre’s account of their participation to suggest that “women’s involvement in this military action was not marginal” and that “the help of those women was more than anticipated. This unexpected behaviour is a function of an emergency situation confronting the crusade leaders and battle planners. Any help was accepted to gain the target of the crusade: the defence of Christendom.”<sup>282</sup>

In terms of factual historical narrative, it seems unlikely that these women participated in battle. Many consider William’s account to be anecdotal, while the *Chanson d’Antioche* is a work of fiction. Furthermore, no other sources suggest that women were involved in the fighting at Antioch or Jerusalem.<sup>283</sup> It is much more likely that such narratives of women in battle were intended as plot devices to accentuate important literary themes. However, much like William’s chronicle, the *Chanson d’Antioche*’s account of these women is still instructive for an examination of medieval attitudes towards violence. The inclusion of this episode and the poem’s overwhelmingly positive response suggests that it was conceivable, even commendable, for the poem’s audience that women participated in combat during the First Crusade. This, in turn, suggests a more nuanced understanding of gender roles during the crusades. Women were understood to be much more than background participants. They had the potential to inspire and actively contribute to this movement. Similarly, the inclusion of this unconventional group on

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<sup>281</sup> William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, ed. and trans. Emily A. Babcock and August C. Krey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 362.

<sup>282</sup> Karen Caspi-Reisfeld, “Women Warriors”, in *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. Charalambos Dendrinos (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 94-105, 100.

<sup>283</sup> Susan Edgington, “‘Son cou ore les fems que jo voi la venir ?’ Women in the *Chanson d’Antioche*”, in *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. Charalambos Dendrinos (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 154-62, 157.

the battlefield suggests that violence, death, and combat were not exclusively the purview of men. Other parties, like women, could step out of their conventional roles and contribute to the success of the First Crusade.

### The Combat Scene

Previously, in a comprehensive study on medieval social ideals entitled *The Origins of Courtliness*, Stephen Jaeger determined that the period from 939 to 1210 saw the development of standards for courtly behaviour which emphasized traits of discretion, compassion, affability, humility, and patience.<sup>284</sup> More recently, however, works published by Raymond Cormier, Dominique Barthelemy, and Joachim Bumke have challenged this interpretation by drawing a distinction between the *ideal* and *reality* of courtly society. For these scholars, the literary representation of a refined courtly standard is representative of a “19<sup>th</sup> century myth of chivalry” which masks a real taste for brutality, fierceness, and aggression in the Middle Age’s warrior class.<sup>285</sup>

This interpretation is reflected in the conflict-riddled world of the epic hero where a propensity for violence was highly prized, together with attributes such as physical strength, fierceness, and intelligence. For these warriors, whether in Homeric works like the *Iliad* or later *chansons de geste* like *Fierabras*, personal glory was measured by an individual’s ability to dispense powerful blows, perform feats of daring, and, above all, annihilate his enemies. Conversely, while the ability to defeat opponents in combat was valued, weakness in the military

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<sup>284</sup> Stephen Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals – 939 – 1210* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 35-6.

<sup>285</sup> Dominique Barthelemy, “Modern Mythologies of Medieval Chivalry”, in *The Medieval World*, eds. Peter Linehan and Janet Nelson (London: Routledge, 2001), 200-215; Raymond J. Cormier “Medieval Courtly Literature, Royal Patronage and World Harmony”, in *Anuario de estudios medievales* 21 (2020), 277–290; Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages* (California: University of California Press, 1991).

sphere was seen a sign of ineptitude and invited derision.<sup>286</sup> As a result, *chansons de geste* placed considerable importance on the various interactions that took place on the battlefield and used this arena to emphasize prevalent attitudes towards specific behaviours.

In *La Chanson de Roland*, the oldest surviving *chanson de geste*, battle scenes regularly feature graphic descriptions of interpersonal violence. For example, Roland, who is fighting against an overwhelming Saracen force as a part of Charlemagne's rear guard, often dispatches his enemies with mighty blows:

*“Tranche le sein et lui brise les os, / Toute l'échine il sépare du dos ; / Du coup de lance il lui fait rendre l'âme, / frappant si bien qu'il fait brandir le corp / et du cheval l'abat a pleine lance. / en deux moitiés il a le cou brisé.”*

[He sliced his breast and broke his bones / separating his spine from his back; / With a blow from his lance he reached his soul, / striking so well that he brandished the body / and from his horse sent it flying off his lance / breaking his enemy's neck in two.]<sup>287</sup>

And

*“En frappa le païen sur son casque, / Brisa l'acier et la tête et les os, / Lui fit sortir les deux yeux de la tête ; / Juste à ses pieds il l'a renversé mort.”*

[By hitting the pagan's helm / he split iron, head, and bone, / popping the pagan's eyes from his skull / until at last he fell at his feat.]<sup>288</sup>

These kinds of descriptions have long been the subject of analysis. In particular, a number of scholars have used these scenes to provide commentary on Roland's morality. Some, such as John Tabb Duvall,<sup>289</sup> have seen a condemnation of the French knight's violence while others, like Sarah Kay,<sup>290</sup> have suggested that Roland's actions are justified based on his role as the epic

<sup>286</sup> Richard Kaeuper associates this concept with the notion of “knightly prowess.” Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence*, 135.

<sup>287</sup> *Roland*, ed. Adolphe d'Avril, 102.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid*, 143.

<sup>289</sup> John T. DuVal, “Glimpses of the Humane in the Epic Song of Roland”, in *Interdisciplinary Humanities* 32 (2015), 5-11.

<sup>290</sup> Sarah Kay, “Ethics and Heroics in the Song of Roland”, in *Neophilologus* 62 (1978), 480-491.

hero. Following in the mould of these works, this section looks at the *Chanson d'Antioche's* interaction with battlefield violence to determine which factors were reflective of contemporary ideals. However, lacking the *Chanson de Roland's* emphasis on a single character, various standardized "combat scenes" will be profiled.

The *Chanson d'Antioche*, like many other epic works, regularly deviates from its overarching narrative to provide intimate descriptions of individual combat. Examples of this might include Baldwin of Beauvais' attack on Clarion at the battle of Civetot:

*Bauduis de Biauvais lait corre l'auferrant,  
Vait ferrir Clarion sor son escu devant,  
Entre les .III. claus le va tot pourfendant.  
Parmi le cuer li met le confanon pendant,  
Mort l'abat del ceval deles desrubant. (A, v. 494-498)*

[Baldwin of Beauvais gave his mount its head / And struck Clarion's glittering shield; / He split it completely apart into three pieces, / And plunged his razor-sharp spear into his heart, / and flung him dead from his horse onto a ravine.]<sup>291</sup>

Or Hugh of St-Pols fight against Maltamin outside of Antioch:

*Fors Huon de Saint Pol qui nel pot endure,  
Ains embrace l'escu, lait le ceval aler.  
De la lance k'il tient a fait le fier branler,  
Vait ferir Matamar sor son escu boucler,  
De l'un cieff jusqu'a l'autre li a fait estroer  
Et le clavain del dos deronpre et depaner;  
Parmi le cors lis fait et fier et fust passer,  
Mort l'abat; l'arme env ait en infer osteler.  
Qui veist le Baron le main au branc jeter,  
De grant cevalerie li peuist ramembrer:  
A .XIII. paiens fist li tiestes voler. (A, v. 4187-4197)*

[Hugh of St-Pol, unable to contain himself, / slung his shield over his arm, spurred his horse / and struck his shield with the lance he carried. / He hit Maltamin on his golden

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<sup>291</sup> *Antioche*, ed. Nelson; *Antioche*, eds. Sweetenham and Edgington, 115.

shield, / splitting and splintering it from top to bottom; / shattered his mailed hood and helmet; ripping the rings apart; / plunged spear point and haft right into his heart, / knocking him dead; and dispatched his soul to take up residence in hell. / Anyone who saw him sword in hand / was treated to a display of true chivalric valour / as he sent 14 pagan heads flying.]<sup>292</sup>

In these combat scenes, Baldwin and Hugh brutalize and dismember their enemies. Significantly, however, the violence perpetrated by these Christian heroes is far from problematic; in fact, their actions are perceived as praiseworthy. For Baldwin, smashing his opponent's shield "into three pieces" and "plunging his razor-sharp spear into his heart" marks him as a "noble lord", while Hugh's ability to "shatter his mailed hood" and send "14 pagan heads flying" is recognized as "a display of true chivalric valour."

Elsewhere, however, similar combat scenes are viewed negatively. This is exemplified by Soliman's assault on a Christian priest:

*Cou fu .I. diemence que l'os est estormie  
Dont oisie .M. cors souner a la bondie  
Entre nos gen se fiert la compagnie haie  
Et cresiens encontre, qui ne lesaient mie  
Et li .I. et li autre, cascun s'ensegne crie.  
Sarrassin on la force, plus de barounie,  
Nos crestiens ocient sor coi il ont envie  
...  
Atant es vous poignant Solimande Nubie,  
La teste le trenca a l'espee fourbie. (A, v. 538-545, 557-558).*

[It was on a Sunday that they stormed the army. / Had you been there you would have heard a thousand trumpets give the signal for attack. / The abominable forces carved heir way through our people: / Christians and Pagans alike screamed out their war cries. / The Saracens with more soldiers had the upper hand / and were itching to kill our Christians... Picture what followed: up came Soliman of Nubia at full tilt / and sliced the priests head off with his shining sword.]<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 189-190.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

Or a Saracen attack on the crusaders' camp:

*Que Sarrasin feront Buiemons le Vaillant.  
Si Dex ne li aie, de mort n'ara garant !*

...  
*À icel mot en torment li cuvert soduiant ;  
Premièrement as dames vont l'or regnes tornant,  
Celes qui lor contenant vont en lor lis mettant  
Et as vielletes vont les mameles sacant.* (A, v. 2521-2522, 2530-2533)

[The Turks attacked Bohemond before nightfall, / spurring to attack at full speed... / The Pagan bastards spurred towards them straight away in a massed attack. / Firstly, they wheeled towards the women, / sweeping the young and attractive ones onto their saddles / and twisting the breasts of the feeble and elderly.]<sup>294</sup>

These two accounts contain many of the same characteristics as the previous descriptions: horses charge, weapons are swung with force, and enemies are beheaded, mutilated, or sliced in half.

However, there is a shift in the way that the poem responds to these sequences. Soliman's assault is interpreted as a "poor" action while the Saracens' attack is described as a "truly painful sight."<sup>295</sup>

As discussed by Sarah Kay, it appears as though the visceral, intimate, and bloody nature of these combat scenes did little to influence contemporary listeners. For the medieval audiences of the *Chanson d'Antioche*, this brutal violence was a standard *topos* of the *chanson de geste* genre which presented a lens into the realities of warfare and death.<sup>296</sup> However, if the brutality of these sequences had limited impact on their interpretation, what factors account for the poem's varied response? Initially, it might appear as though the answer to this question is straightforward: violence committed by Christians should be lauded while violence committed by Saracens is an offence. However, while this is a defining feature of these sequences, Saracen

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<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 115, 155.

<sup>296</sup> Sarah Kay, *The Chanson de Geste in the Age of Romance: Political Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1-2.



versus Christian is an oversimplification of a complex issue which was, in fact, reflected in medieval political theory.<sup>297</sup>

Significantly, it appears the *Chanson d'Antioche*'s standard for morally acceptable violence was influenced by contemporary theological attitudes. More specifically, the poem reflects many of the principles inherent to medieval "just war theory." Two aspects of just war theory seem to have had a particular impact. The first concerns the justification for war (*ius ad bellum*). This concept maintained that, for a war to be just, the perpetrator must have the authority to go to war (rightful sovereign or decree), fight for an appropriate reason or goal (a just cause), and have the correct intention. The second major thread concerns the conduct of warfare (*ius in bello*). This aspect of just war theory grew out of emerging chivalric ideals and religious ethics which in turn had to reconcile courtly and Christian morals.<sup>298</sup> Therefore, conduct in warfare was also moderated by an ethic of courtliness which involved matters of behaviour – elegance, comportment – and valorized elements like strength, compassion, and protection of the weak.

These ideas were crystallized in several prominent medieval tracts. Orderic Vitalis, in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, a work composed between 1125 and 1141, presented a passionate defense of the crusading movement which was rooted in these principles. He maintained that violence committed against the right people (Saracens), in the right place (battlefield), and for the right reasons (God) was acceptable.<sup>299</sup> Similarly, Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica*,

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<sup>297</sup> Henrik Syse, "Augustine and Just War: Between Virtue and Duties", in *Ethics, Nationalism, and Just Wars: Medieval and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Henrik Syse and Gregory M. Reichberg (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 36-50.

<sup>298</sup> Kate L. Foran, "Poets and Politics: Just War in Geoffrey Chaucer and Christine de Pizan", in *Ethics, Nationalism, and Just Wars: Medieval and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Henrik Syse and Gregory M. Reichberg (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 99-116, 100.

<sup>299</sup> Orderic Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical history*, 32.

a work composed between 1265 and 1274, reflected in detail on the concepts of war and peace and refined many of the emerging ideas concerning just warfare. His thorough treatment of war was particularly important for ideas concerning preventive violence. As noted by Gregory M. Reichberg “Aquinas appears to think that occasions may arise when offensive war may be justified: to regain stolen goods, to thwart and to punish organized evil doing, or to protect innocents from harm.”<sup>300</sup>

Much like these scholars, the *Chanson d'Antioche* is influenced by concepts of justification and conduct. In particular, the poem placed considerable importance on the target, space, and rationale for violent action. These factors are reflected in the characteristics that define the poem's response to the previous combat scenes. Significantly, Baldwin and Hugh attack appropriate targets. Not only do they fight against other warriors, but they also engage the ideological enemy (Saracen), while the Saracens attack Christians and target non-combatants (priests, women, elderly). Further, the space in which these violent interactions occur impacted their interpretation. Baldwin and Hugh commit violence in the appropriate arena for martial pursuits (battlefields), while the Saracens commit violence outside these confines (crusaders' tents and camps). Finally, underpinning the importance of target and space is the element of reason. Hugh and Baldwin kill their enemies as a part of a divinely sanctioned mission (crusade), while the Saracens lacks this fundamental justification and act on behalf of their “pagan” gods. As a result, the Christians adhere to an established moral standard of just warfare, while the Saracens' actions constitute a violation of these principles.

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<sup>300</sup> Gregory M. Reichberg, “Is there a ‘Presumption against War’ in Aquinas’s Ethics?”, in *Ethics, Nationalism, and Just Wars: Medieval and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Henrik Syse and Gregory M. Reichberg (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 72-97, 74.

The *Chanson d'Antioche*'s response to these combat scenes was also impacted by the conduct of warfare. This manifested itself most clearly in thematic elements and literary tropes. When looking at violence committed by Baldwin and Hugh, there is an emphasis on their individual courage. One of the ways that this was conveyed is through their ability to act in desperate circumstances. Significantly, both their combat scenes are framed by the likelihood of defeat and death. Baldwin's battle with Clarion follows a sequence in which the overeager crusaders pursue a Saracen army into an ambush, while Hugh's fight with Maltamin occurs during a Christian rout. In both cases the crusaders have been caught unaware and are on the backfoot. Yet, despite these circumstances – Baldwin is trapped between two armies and Hugh is in full retreat – these men heroically engage and dispatch their enemies.

Further, their actions are framed by the importance of the collective. In the preamble to both combat scenes, the poem is explicit in informing the audience that many Christians are suffering. In Baldwin's case the crusaders are engaged in an "agonizing battle that made mothers weep with grief for their children",<sup>301</sup> while in Hugh's, the Christian forces are in "total disarray", unable to "put up a convincing resistance", and "lamenting the sad pass they were in."<sup>302</sup> However, during these moments of collective struggle Baldwin and Hugh inspire those around them. Baldwin's fight with Clarion galvanizes the failing Christian army and encourages "others [to] follow on, taking new heart", while Hugh's decision to turn about and face the enemy motivates others to join the fray. These thematic elements contribute the positive interpretation of these actions and further exalt the Christian heroes. Not only do they commit

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<sup>301</sup> *Antioche*, eds. Sweetenham and Edgington, 115.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid*, 189.

violence against the correct target, in appropriate locations, and for the right reasons, they do so when it matters most and against overwhelming odds.

Conversely, the Saracens' violence is buttressed by derogatory themes and tropes. In Soliman's case, his attack is framed by the paradigm of the "pagan" Saracen. Therefore, his combat scene contains elements of religious symbolism: he attacks on a holy day (Sunday), specifically kills a Christian priest, and interrupts a religious rite (mass). These details frame his violence as a spiritual transgression and accentuate the shock and horror associated with his actions. Similarly, the second combat scene emphasizes the Saracens' viciousness. During this attack, they head straight for the "young and attractive women" after which they squeeze "the breasts of the feeble and elderly" and leave children to "suckled the corpses of their dead mothers."<sup>303</sup> This targeted and unnecessary cruelty further problematizes their attack. Not only have they broken the fundamental rules that govern the use of violence (target, space, reason) but they have also egregiously violated the ethical values of warfare.

The *Chanson Antioche*'s response to these combat scenes, then, suggests that the intellectual ideal for morally acceptable violence is reflected in the more colloquial realm of the epic. As represented by scholars such as Orderic Vitalis and Thomas Aquinas, standards for warfare were regulated by the notions of justification and conduct. The *Chanson d'Antioche*, through its description and response to various combat scenes, applies similar ideals. The poem highlights an understanding that acceptable violence must be committed against the correct target, in the correct place, and with fundamental justification, while also highlighting the

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<sup>303</sup> *Ibid*, 155.

importance of individual conduct by framing acceptable violence within appropriate thematic constructs.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusion

In a recent publication, Susan Edgington sought answers to questions she had about the role and depiction of women in the *Chanson d'Antioche*.<sup>304</sup> Her study is an example of the valuable insights that can be gained from an examination of literary sources using different modalities of inquiry. She discusses the poem's interaction with women and claims that their contribution to the text was "one element in the entertainment" devised to "dress up the tale of heroic deeds" and to "amuse, entertain, and perhaps inspire."<sup>305</sup> Most importantly, however, she cites similar view to this thesis in her interpretation of the poem's approach to gender. Edgington is interested in the depiction of women for the "light it throws on its writer and intended audience" and concludes her analysis with the claim that this group was viewed "indulgently" and "through the eyes of men."<sup>306</sup>

In this thesis, I have sought to apply an approach similar to Edgington's; however, my aim has been to show that a close analysis of the *Chanson d'Antioche* is relevant to our understanding of contemporary medieval attitudes towards alterity, space, and violence. In the first chapter, I demonstrated that the poem presents a predominantly disparaging view of the Saracen. This group was regularly associated with derogatory themes and literary devices that were intended to highlight their inferiority. Saracen warriors engage in cowardly behaviours (use of missiles, flight, numerical superiority) and are associated with passiveness (mules) and submissiveness (*obeisance*). They lack emotional fortitude (crying, fainting), act irrationally in

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<sup>304</sup> Susan Edgington, "'Son cou ore les fems que jo voi la venir ?' Women in the Chanson d'Antioche", in *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. Charalambos Dendrinos (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 154-62.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

moments of adversity (tearing hair, laments), and ignorantly fail to recognize their inferior status. Their religion, which is based on an inverted version of Christianity (idolatry, devil worship, polytheism), renders them as evil “pagans” who worship false gods. Their association with problematic behaviours like betrayal, torture, and duplicity highlights their moral corruption. However, at times, they also appear as powerful and effective warriors that a) display an impressive rhetorical and tactical ability, b) demonstrate an understanding of Christianity’s superior status, and c) adhere to the poem’s moral strictures. This ambiguity suggests that the *Chanson d’Antioche*’s audience understood the Saracens as an inferior group, but also as one with the potential to match established Christian standards.

The second chapter examined the concept of space within the *Chanson d’Antioche*. The description of travel played an important role in developing spatial awareness. Journeys between the Occident and Orient highlight prevalent attitudes towards the locations traversed *enroute* to the East (Rome, Constantinople) while also providing insight into the medieval understanding of geography, distance, and movement in the context of two regions – East and West – undergoing a greater sense of definition and relative location. The poem’s interaction with Antioch developed the city both in physical and abstract terms. In a physical sense, reference to Antioch’s walls, fortresses, and gates, together with other surrounding features (river, mountain, bridge), establish the city as a powerful military bastion which dominates a vast topographical ecosystem. In an abstract sense, the traumatic nature of Antioch’s protracted eight-month siege tied the city to notions of suffering, death, and struggle, while the city’s association with prominent Christian saints and relics highlights its importance as an ancient religious centre. Jerusalem also features heavily in the abstract. The poem’s account of this city emphasizes its function both as a driving force for the outset of the First Crusade and as an ongoing objective for the poem’s protagonists.

As such, the poem reaffirms Jerusalem's place in European cosmologies as an important part of Christ's legacy, a spiritual focal point, and the final objective of the First Crusade.

The third chapter looked at the *Chanson d'Antioche*'s depiction of spectacular and dramatic violence. The ambiguous response to the Tafurs' cannibalism suggests that medieval audiences viewed such a phenomenon in a nuanced fashion. On the one hand, cannibalism is abhorred in the *Chanson d'Antioche*: it is condemned by the poem's heroes and associated with madness. On the other hand, we encounter instances where cannibalism and its effects are interpreted in more permissive ways. The poem's account of the final battle for Antioch, in which a battalion of women participate in the fighting, similarly suggests a nuanced interpretation of gender roles in the crusades and a collectivized approaches to violence. The decision to include this unconventional group, and the positive response to their actions, highlights the participation of women in the First Crusade as not only plausible but even commendable. The poem's account of the "combat scene", and its varied responses to these intimate descriptions of battle, highlights which specific features defined morally acceptable violence. These descriptions maintain views propounded in prominent theological works. Namely, the morality of violence was defined by its target, space, and justification, along with important thematic elements such as courage and heroism.

The results of studies such as this one should encourage others to look more closely at the *chansons de geste* for the insights they provide concerning contemporary attitudes. These poems continually present us with ideas of how systems, groups, and practices were understood by their audiences. As such, even when our views concerning certain aspects of *chansons* are based on overarching ideas about the genre it is good to examine them in isolation and in depth. A close analysis of the *Chanson d'Antioche* reveals that this poem is, first and foremost, a work of fiction



in which reality takes a back seat to the requirements of literary and epic form. In the words of Robert Cook, it is “an epico-romanesque tradition finding and defining itself without ever becoming unrecognizable.”<sup>307</sup> The poem is not an accurate representation of the events it describes, but it is “real” in another sense. The vicissitudes of real life are moulded into a narrative filled with tension, drama, and humor. Audiences are consistently drawn in and encouraged to imagine themselves as participants. This creates a heightened versions of reality which, in turn, reflects mentalities and attitudes. The insights these works can provide concerning medieval perceptions is one of the most interesting aspects of studying Old French epic poetry.

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<sup>307</sup> “une tradition epico-romanesque qui se cherche et se définit sans jamais devenir méconnaissable.” Robert F. Cook, “Les épopées de la croisade”, in *Aspect de l'épopées romane: mentalité, idéologies, intersexualité*, eds. H. van Dijk and W. Noomen (Groningen : Forsten, 1995), 93-110, 103.

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